

THE SCOUNDREL

MARK ALDANOV is outstanding as a novelist who knows both Russia and the West intimately. As a result, he can depict with force and compassion the actors in the central drama of our time.

The action of this novel takes place during the years 1952 to 1955 in Berlin, Paris; Capri and Venice. The story moves with swift pace and with all the range of a master novelist from the tensions of Berlin to the sweet romance on Capri between Schell, known to the international world of espionage by the nickname of Count Saint-Germain, and a young Russian girl.

Aldanov's novels have been translated into twenty-four languages. Since the Second World War they have been published only in the free countries on this side of the Iron Curtain and have ceased to appear in eastern Europe where they were also very widely read before.

THE SCOUNDREL

by

Mark Aldanov



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CHAPTER ONE

THE house was one of those new ones in West Berlin. Schell's flat was small, just two rooms. A Venetian chandelier lighted the study, which had a great many books in it and two pictures, an old-fashioned clock with little figures on it—and a little sideboard of carved wood with china in it.

Not in the least like the study of a famous spy, thought the colonel, arranging his cards.

'I've got three kings,' said Schell.

'Four jacks,' replied the colonel. 'You're out of luck. I've heard that during the past month you've lost forty thousand marks.'

'Your friends are well informed,' said Schell. 'But for today we've really had enough.' He took out his wallet and counted out some bills. 'I think that's right, but please count it.'

The colonel put the money in his pocket without counting it. 'That last hand did you in.'

'Would you like a snack?' Schell asked. 'I've got something here.'

'That depends a little on just what you have. On the other hand, I don't need much. Just give me lobster thermidor, pheasant, crêpes suzette, a bottle of champagne, and I'll be satisfied.'

'That, unfortunately, I can't offer you, but I have got some beer, cheese, and some of those countless German sausages.'

He was lolling in the easy-chair with one leg flung over the other. There was an expression on his face of thorough-going satisfaction with life. The personification of idleness—as though you couldn't see through it! He's probably lost the last of his money and is desperate, thought the colonel, who was always extremely observant, especially when hiring new and important agents; he tried to draw conclusions about them, though he never had the slightest confidence in their accuracy: he had been mistaken too often. He's very well dressed, the colonel went on musing to himself, though only a man some ten years younger should dress that way. As I recall, he's forty-two. He's probably one of those people who say that a man should get his clothes either from the finest tailors in the world or else from an old-clothes man. His suit looks English, but it couldn't have been made in England, they haven't got such good cloth now. His shoes have built-up heels—very strange with his gigantic size. Can he want to hypnotize people with his height? If so, he's a *poseur*: not so good.

The colonel himself was dressed in expensive mufti, which he wore carelessly.

'Just let me have whatever there is. When there's no champagne, beer must be drunk; when there's no lobster thermidor, sausages must be eaten. That's my philosophy of life.'

'Not a blaze of originality,' said Schell, 'but absolutely right.' He was also 'observing.' What a lot of them I've seen! And it's time to get down to business. . . . Some of them do a Napoleon act, as though they never had a second free. This one isn't like that. Schell liked the colonel, both because he was simple and polite, even

affable, and because he had come to visit him at home, eating and playing cards with him without behaving like a future commanding officer. His looks are skilfully deceptive, Schell thought. He looks like an old country doctor who treats poor patients and goes on bringing them medicines. Kindness, benevolence, imperturbable tranquillity: 'Take it easy, don't worry. . . .' That's the great strength of the Americans, that's why they're the most powerful people in the world. . . . Grey hair, youthful-looking face, but the cheeks a little flabby already, with red veins. He may be easily the greatest expert in espionage I've ever known.

'I'll bring along whatever I find right away,' Schell said, and got up.

There was a 'cello in one corner of the room. The colonel got up and walked over to the bookshelves. So he's one of the intelligentzia, after all! Freud . . . Jung. . . . They say he once had a nervous breakdown for a while; that leaves some effect even after you recover. Is it still worth getting tied up with him? I'll have to wait and see.

There were some classics on the shelves but also cheap detective stories. Hmmm. Judge a man by his books. . . . I've seen agents like that, too, who weren't such great shakes either, for that matter. . . . The china is very good, tricoloured Ming! But it's obvious there was a lot of money around, or else, of course, he bought it here right after the war.

Aside from the china, the room was full of a great many other small, contrived, and mostly exotic objects—on the bookcases, on the little table, and on the desk. Several were beautiful and all of them were decidedly useless—

the sort of thing bought by nervous travellers, thought the colonel. In the other corner of the study, opposite the 'cello, stood a cabinet containing dumbbells. The colonel tried one of them and could scarcely lift it, although he was very powerful and in his youth had been something of an athlete. From what one hears Schell was a real Hercules; for that matter, you can still see it. . . . I can see my collection of human specimens is going to be increased by one more curiosity. He's probably going to ask for a lot of money. On the other hand, that last affair of his in Belgium didn't come off; after that he ought to lower his rates somewhat.

'I see you've got a lot of books in foreign languages,' he said when Schell returned with the tray.

'I used to like reading; now I'm slowly learning to forget it. It's no satisfaction any longer.'

'Really? I said "foreign languages," but actually which languages are foreign to you? I suppose you're Russian by origin?'

'No.'

'No?' The colonel lingered over the word unbelievably. 'Well, if you say so. You talk English almost like an American.'

'I talk French almost like a Frenchman and German almost like a German. But that "almost" is a dangerous business; a great many foreign spies in Russia must have come to a bad end because they spoke Russian "almost" like Russians. I've turned up another bottle of vodka. Would you like some?'

'Why not? You may not be Russian but your tastes are.'

'Vodka is drunk all over the world. There's nothing better, unless you count champagne.'

Schell took off a ring with some sort of rare greenish stone, gave the bottom of the bottle a sharp blow, and the cork flew out. The colonel had never seen this done before and smiled. The ring must be some sort of good-luck piece, they're nearly all superstitious. And what strangler's hands! And those eyebrows joined together. . . .

They started drinking and eating. Schell took a small cylinder out of his waistcoat pocket, poured some powder into a glass of beer, and drank it down.

'Have you stomach trouble? Or a cold?'

'That's it. A slight fever.'

'Have you had it long? When I have a cold I just take some good old aspirin.'

'No, this is an exotic drug.'

'Exotic?'

'Mexican. Mexico has wonderful medicines, still there since the days of the Aztecs.'

'I heard you went to Mexico a little while ago. On business?'

'Yes, business, too.'

'What passport do you have, by the way?'

'As though you didn't know! Argentinian.'

'You made a very good choice of name. Anyone at all can be named Schell: a German, Englishman, Frenchman, Hungarian, or Russian.'

'I didn't "choose" my name. It actually is my family name.'

'In our little world you're quite a famous man.'

'My name is known to fifty men, yours is known to a hundred.'

'Wasn't your last nickname Count Saint-Germain, after the celebrated eighteenth-century adventurer?' asked the colonel, laughing. 'They say you've had just as many adventures as he.'

'Probably, just like most old spies.'

'To be sure that's the kind of trade it is,' said the colonel. Perhaps at heart he does think of himself as a new Count Saint-Germain. 'You've probably read a great deal about him?'

'Of course, if only because I was given such a nickname.'

'You've been an aviator and aren't a *bad* parachutist. Is it true that physically you're practically as strong as Joe Louis?'

'Highly exaggerated. But there's still something left. What have your agents told you about me?' asked Schell. 'Tell me whatever you can. I don't think it's necessary in our business to hide everything and try to deceive whomever you're speaking to about everything. Especially someone hard to deceive.'

'I don't think so either. Only *bad* spies think that. . . . What have they told me? A lot. Various things. In old-fashioned novels they would probably have called you a "man with a broken heart." ' The colonel handed an old-fashioned silver cigarette case over to Schell, who took a cigarette and ostentatiously pressed his fingers on the smooth surface with some force.

'Perhaps you need my fingerprints? Here they are.'

'You've probably picked that up from your detective stories, aside from which I already have them.'

'Is my dossier a big one?'

'Fairly. It's not short.'

'Perhaps there's even more on me at Colonel Number Two's.'

'Who?'

'That's my name for the Soviet officer who's your opposite number in Berlin, on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The odd thing is that you resemble each other not only in your jobs but also in your positions. You're only a colonel, but I know very well indeed that in your Berlin headquarters you're practically the head. The same thing goes for him. But you know perfectly well who he is, and he knows perfectly well who you are. . . . You must agree that there's no other city in the world now which is more interesting than Berlin. It is the centre of international espionage. In a free moment I once tried to count up how many foreign agencies there are in Berlin; I got up to thirty and stopped counting. And it's inevitable. Berlin and Vienna are the only cities in the world where it's possible to pass with every convenience from one world to another in a few minutes by subway. . . .'

'Of course, you understand,' said the colonel, glancing at Schell, 'that in talking to any candidate for our service we must ask ourselves the question: can he be a double agent? But in my experience, in the real sense of the word, there are hardly any double agents; every one of them always prefers one of the two sides and in reality serves only that one. Personally, I have nothing against such agents.'

'Perhaps you even give them higher wages, which would be natural.'

'I, for instance, would have nothing in principle against our agents sometimes, in a case of extreme emergency, maintaining relations with Colonel Number Two. It goes without saying only on condition that *in reality* they work for us. We pay more, too.'

'I think they sometimes pay very well.'

'We'll be able to come to an understanding on the money side. . . . You are quite free to cross into the East Sector?'

'A simple enough matter.'

'Have you connections over there?'

'No.'

'Do you work only for the money?'

'You speak as though other people work out of conviction.'

'A great many. Out of conviction and patriotism.'

'Unpaid?'

'Of course not. People must eat and drink.'

'I think that in your department, with the exception of its heads, foreigners predominate. They may also be patriots, but of what country?'

'Some of them work for revenge, out of hatred for the government of their own country.'

'For such feelings they get very good wages indeed. . . . There are some distinguished people among real spies. They usually combine in themselves the good qualities of officers with the good qualities of—what should I say?—of writers, for instance: penetration, observation, knowledge of people, imagination, the ability to project themselves into another person. Those of them who serve their own country are even respectable people. Judging

by what I've heard, and from my own observation, you, for instance, are a perfectly respectable man.'

'Thank you very much,' said the colonel. 'You speak of *our* trade. My trade is not quite identical with yours. I work behind a desk, and the main thing with me is system—the comparison and analysis of the reports I receive. Everything lies in being conscientious, attentive, and patient.'

'That was your old school of thought. And you actually belong to it, even though you've renovated it and made a great career in the last few years. Would you be surprised if I told you that Colonel Number Two is also an honourable man, though with qualities of all kinds, to be sure, like all of them, and surrounded by scoundrels? He's in a difficult position. Generally speaking, Stalin must be told what he wants to hear. He can't endure disagreeable reports.'

'The heads of the Russian secret service, as well as of all secret services in general, require the truth to be reported to them. Whether or not they report it to Stalin unembellished, of course, I don't know.'

'They embellish it. But for other reasons as well the colonel is not going to be able to hang on to his post. After all, with them it's like a crowded bus—everyone standing in the aisle hates everyone sitting down.'

'He's not a bad specialist and is a former combat officer. At the end of the war he was in command of a regiment and was wounded in the leg. That's why he was transferred to the secret service.'

'They say he's getting tired of the job he has now.'

I admit that decent people can be found everywhere, but . . .’

‘Not everywhere. In the Gestapo there were no decent people and in the GPU there aren’t any either.’

‘But the chemical formula for a spy would be something like this: 50 per cent. love of money, 20 per cent. sporting instinct, 10 per cent. stupidity, 10 per cent. intellectual considerations, 10 per cent. boredom with an empty or unsuccessful life.’

‘Add a certain percentage of psychic instability.’

‘Yes, of course, the morphine and cocaine addicts.’

‘Those, too. Or, more exactly, many turn into morphine addicts; the work is difficult. And when they turn into morphine addicts they usually become worthless. . . . So you only work for the money,’ he said with some disappointment. ‘And I thought you would be just the one to have a very large percentage of “sporting instinct.” I suppose Count Saint-Germain was primarily on the search for strong sensations. Is that true?’

‘Money most likely entered into that, too. There was love, hate, jealousy, envy, wine, politics, sport, lofty and non-lofty ideas, while somewhere in all of that, gold popped up, too. As with most people. Why do they hide it or deny it?’

What a shallow view, thought the colonel. In his own life money did not take up much room.

‘Does all this mean it’s really just the same to you *whom* you work for?’

‘Not quite the same. Circumstances vary. For instance, it’s more dangerous to work for the Western world than for the Eastern. In case of a fiasco you people have a trial,

but they just shoot you, and what's much worse they torture you beforehand.'

'Well, there you are, you do admit some difference between the Western and Eastern worlds. I heard you hate the Soviet for personal reasons, too. But that actually isn't so important to us. In our business you don't ask a man about his past. As long as he works for us honestly,' the colonel repeated.

'You probably want to send me into Russia by parachute?'

'We never send anyone into Russia by parachute,' said the colonel coldly. 'And we have no dramatic, hair-raising projects.'

'It's a pity you don't. If your agents had killed Hitler fifteen years ago, tens of millions of people would have been saved.'

'Nevertheless, we've never gone in for anything like that,' said the colonel still more coldly. 'And I don't want to send you into Russia necessarily either. You would be able to act as you saw fit. We want to get one helpless man out of Moscow. He's a scientist and has nothing to do with politics. The only thing we want is his discovery.'

'Not so simple.'

'I shouldn't have come to you for something *simple*.'

'But this is especially difficult. People don't come back from Russia.'

'That's a great exaggeration.'

'You're most likely surrounded by Soviet agents.'

'Possibly, though I don't think so. I've had extra-

ordinarily few failures, aside from which I'm not going to say anything about you to any of my subordinates.'

'And to your superiors?'

'They can keep that and other secrets, too.'

'"And other secrets, too!" I admit that for me this secret has a certain significance.'

'The pay is very high. Well, what about it?'

'I'll give you an answer in two or three weeks. I have to take a trip to Italy. Not "on business," just to take a rest.'

'A delay is a little inconvenient. . . . Of course, if you have a fever. . . . That's not a long-drawn-out business, I hope?'

'No, it's nothing serious. My health is all right. I simply need a rest in Italy. I'd like to bask in the sun.'

'Where will you be going?'

'I don't know yet, probably Florence,' replied Schell carelessly. He actually intended to go to Capri. 'I'll make a decision there.'

'What, in particular, makes you hesitate?'

'I'm simply sick of our trade.'

'So that's it! Then you'll give me a reply not later than two weeks from now?'

'If I refuse I'll send you a telegram. In any case, I shall be seeing you before I leave. On some other business.'

'Not about yourself?' asked the colonel, pricking up his ears.

'No, about a certain woman. There's no point talking about it now. . . . And does this Soviet inventor *want* to leave the USSR?'

'He hates the Soviet régime.'

'And he won't report me first?'

'You can take precautions. I know it's a difficult assignment, otherwise I wouldn't have set aside so much money for it,' said the colonel with significant emphasis. 'You will persuade him to leave.'

'Of course, it's very tempting. What's this scientist's name?'

The colonel lit another cigarette. There's no guarantee that he's not *their* double agent, he said to himself. But no matter whom I found there wouldn't be any guarantee. Nevertheless it's *almost* a certainty that he won't report it. It would be bad for him, too; then he would be done for! And according to everything known about him he's not an informer.

'How can I risk someone else's life when you still haven't given me an answer?'

'You know perfectly well that such a risk is inevitable. No matter whom you turned to, after all, you would have to give the name, and you couldn't be sure the man wouldn't report it. And I won't report it. Whatever I may be I have my own code of honour. Or, to put it less pompously,' Schell went on, 'I won't work unless I'm believed. And really I must know everything about him. I always begin by thinking often and at length about a mission that's coming up, and about the people I'll have to deal with. It's essential that I know everything about this scientist.'

'But I myself know hardly anything about him.' . . . His name is Nikolai Maikov,' said the colonel after a short pause. 'I can add that his discovery is not of the

slightest military significance. It has to do with lengthening human life or something like that.'

'Then why are *you* getting him out?'

'This really isn't part of my usual activities. But a very well-known and influential biologist of our own told Washington that according to his information this Russian scientist's discovery was enormously important and under the right conditions might produce staggering results. I've been commissioned to try to help him. When I get your answer I'll tell you everything I know. I know very well you won't report back concerning this Maikov. You're not capable of it, it would be a very dirty business, and no use at all to yourself. I know you can be relied on. . . . And what are you going to do if you leave espionage?' he asked, as though it was of no interest to him.

'I'm beginning to come around to the idea that I could earn just as much and even more by working at something rather less dangerous. In my youth I wanted to become a writer.'

'Why not finish your career as a spy by a brilliant mission? Then you'd have the money, too. . . . 'I heard you had a fiasco recently,' said the colonel, half questioningly.

'If it was, it wasn't my fault,' retorted Schell angrily. 'For that matter, it wasn't a fiasco.'

'And what if it was? Who hasn't had one? . . . Now, the sum we would pay you if you succeed would launch you on a safer life. Though I don't believe in it too much. People don't get out of espionage. . . . However, you can write your memoirs or a novel. All spies want to write their memoirs or a novel.'

‘I even know a few who went into espionage just for that reason.’

‘So have I. And what bad books they wrote! Good spies don’t write books. You can be the first.’

‘Then you’re willing to wait two or three weeks?’

‘What can I do about it?’ said the colonel.

CHAPTER TWO

At the club, Schell played bridge, not poker, and again he lost. The last rubber was especially disastrous. Standing away from the table, he thoughtfully calculated that his entire fortune now consisted of eighteen hundred dollars. Not so long ago it had been six times as much. Well, I'll leave Edda something. In all fairness she's not so greedy. When she haggles, it's more out of a sense of duty. If I manage to unload her on to Colonel Number Two I'll be able to give her four hundred dollars. Payment for a month in advance—rather gentlemanly.

He had scarcely settled himself at a small table, after looking at his watch, when a flunkey came up to him and said that a lady was asking for him in the anteroom. Damn her! Schell thought with irritation. The club was old-fashioned enough not to allow women inside.

'I'll be right down.'

Unhurriedly he examined himself in the huge mirror on the wall. His tie was impeccably tied, not a single hair fell across his parting, artfully arranged so that the beginning of a bald spot was almost unnoticeable. The grey in his hair did not upset him—far better than baldness.

Edda was sitting in a corner of the huge, empty lobby. Obviously there was going to be another scene, thought Schell. What was it today?

She wore a mink cape, and a light violet dress, and was made up 'challengingly.' Everything was painted—face,

cheeks, eyelashes, feet, the hair a light gold colour. And Natasha doesn't even know where to buy women's make-up! This one will have to be got rid of, no matter how disagreeable the method. . . . Because of that mass of gold her face looks twice as broad, she can't manage even that. She should have painted over the little moustache on her upper lip, it really disfigures her. Pouches under her eyes already. She drinks too much; she'll soon lose her looks.

He composed his face to an adequate, though not extreme, degree of enthusiasm.

'How happy I am to see you!' he said, kissing her hand.

'I don't know. Are you happy or not? I have the feeling what you wanted to say was, "And what is it this time?"' she began. Hoopla, he thought, off to the races!

'Nothing of the sort, and luckily you don't think so either. How are you?' asked Schell. As a matter of fact, she's still very attractive, but Natasha's a hundred times better.

'How am I? Splendid. Wonderful. How should a woman be whose lover wants to get rid of her? But I haven't come here to make a scene.'

'That's very nice to hear. But to what do I owe the pleasure and privilege of your visit?' For some time past they usually addressed each other in this tone, which both of them liked.

'You owe the pleasure and privilege of my visit to my having to know once and for all whether you've seen him,' said Edda, dropping her voice sharply and looking around uneasily.

'Whom, my little sweetie pie?' he asked, in one of the American phrases he affected with her.

'First of all, stop calling me your "little sweetie pie." You're not American and neither am I.'

'Is it my fault your name is Edda? And secondly?'

'Secondly, you know perfectly well "who." The Soviet colonel.'

'I expect to see him today.'

'So late?'

'He's given me an appointment for half-past eleven. . . . But have you made up your mind?'

'Surely I don't have to give a final answer today?' she asked. Her face had changed a little. He began to feel sorry for her. I shouldn't behave this way with her, after all, he thought.

'As you like. . . . Just remember that I'm not trying to talk you into it.'

'You're lying; you did talk me into it.'

'The last thing I was thinking of. I'll tell you once more: use your own judgment. It's a difficult and dangerous business, and not the least bit romantic. You've got a Mata Hari complex and a Nero complex as well. But you'll live for eighty years, and in your old age you'll be able to invest your money in second mortgages at 12 per cent. Why do you want to do it? Write poetry. You're a first-rate poetess.'

'You can't live on poetry—especially Russian poetry.'

'Write French verse.'

Edda really did write, but newspapers and magazines stubbornly refused to print her.

'No one reads poetry now. The bourgeois world is

undergoing an unprecedented decline of cultural standards. A conspiracy of silence has been formed against me, just because I'm not just any Russian *émigrée*.'

'Yes, that's true. Then don't write verse,' he said. He knew it annoyed Edda to be agreed with immediately. 'In any case, you're not Russian either by origin or, for that matter, by education.'

He actually did not know just what her nationality was. Edda spoke Russian with an indefinite, scarcely noticeable accent, and spoke of her past rarely, obscurely, and always differently. They talked Russian, French, German, or English together: they had an unusual gift for languages. ,

Their affair had been going on for less than six months. They had come together accidentally, and with no great love for or interest in each other. Schell himself had told her that he was an agent, chiefly out of curiosity as to what effect it would have. After his nervous breakdown—and before Natasha—he had grown less cautious. It had an enormous effect. Edda was agreeably startled: there had been no agents in her life before. For a long time she kept babbling nonsense about her enigmatic soul, about Dostoevski, and about Sartre. 'If you like the idea so much why don't you take it up yourself?' he had asked, still almost without any ulterior thoughts. 'D'you think I might be able to make a career in the field?' she asked, looking at him avidly. The word 'field' annoyed him immediately. 'It's a most suitable "field" for you.'

'And I'm not going over to the Bolsheviks. I don't like them.'

'For this no liking is required.'

'Though I consider that they have some intellectual justification.'

'It's possible to find some intellectual justification.'

'But I'll never be a spy!'

'Not a spy and not even an agent, but a counteragent. We don't use the word "spy," it has a bad sound.'

'What a book I might write about it!'

'Is that why you want to do it? I give you enough money.'

'You know perfectly well that if I go over to them it won't be for the money, but because . . .'

'Because you have a demonic soul.'

'If I go over to them it's because of my hatred for bourgeois society! What they're doing now in America is a horrible nightmare!'

'Yes, yes, I know, my cherry blossom.'

'And I hate the capitalist system because . . .'

'Because you have no capital.'

'No, not because of that!'

'Very well, very well,' he said. 'But tell me plainly: should I talk to the colonel or not? There's a chance of it today.'

'Where would he send me to?' she asked, lowering her voice still more. 'I won't go behind the Iron Curtain.'

'They'd hardly send you to do some spying on themselves.'

'Then where?'

'How can I tell? Perhaps Paris.'

'I'd go anywhere if it were with you,' she said shyly. 'I want to be doing the same thing as you. But I would go alone to Paris. Of course, only if they pay well. I must live.'

'I give you four hundred dollars a month.'

'You've been giving me that, but I know you've lost everything you had. . . . When are you leaving?'

'The day after tomorrow.'

'For Madrid?'

'Yes, Madrid. I've told you that a dozen times. . . . I'm asking for the second time, should I talk to the colonel? Remember once and for all that I haven't given you any advice and I'm not giving you any.'

'D'you think it's very dangerous?'

'I don't know about the "very." It depends on the assignment. But of course espionage is a risky business. I know you like to gamble with life, that's your most basic trait.' A nibble, he thought. 'Just the same, I'm not giving any advice. You look too nervous for such a profession. They'll probably just send you to Paris.'

'Perhaps I'll agree just for the experience. One must experience everything! And if I get sick of it I'll drop it. If I accept their proposal, will they send me off immediately?'

'Don't accept their proposal. Sit at home and drink champagne. . . . No, they won't send you off at once. First of all, the colonel will make some inquiries about you. He has a secret department of his own. Then that will all be transmitted to the administration of the MVD. You'll be interrogated by a commissioner; and he may send you to the *Glavrazvedupr*, that is, Central Military Intelligence. So you'll have some time even if I speak to the colonel today. Now remember, I'm not giving you advice.'

'You keep insisting that you're not giving me advice.'

You have a dark soul. That's why I love you. Will you be back in two weeks? And what am I going to live on in the meantime? I've got a hundred marks left.'

'I have a thousand dollars. I'll leave you half. Now, for the third and last time, I ask you, should I speak about you to the colonel or shouldn't I?'

'I've been hesitating myself for a long time.'

'Then, damn it, stop!'

'I've been thinking it over a great deal. You know the last thing anyone could call me is stupid,' she said. How amusing, thought Schell, she thinks she's very clever and very wicked, and what she is really is very stupid and rather kind. 'But there's no other way out for me. First of all, I'm fed up with Berlin. Secondly, you've lost everything and soon there'll be nothing for me to live on. Thirdly, it happens that I want to gamble with life, get excited, triumph over people. . . . But there's one thing that stops me. I still think spying isn't a very noble business!'

'How can you say such a thing!'

'I absolutely do not sympathize with the Communists! Suppose I look as though I were going to work for them, they give me a visa and send me to France or the United States, and then I go over to the Allies, what then?'

'That's what a lot of people do. Actually that isn't so noble either. But if you seduce some American officer there that would be at least a little nobler. That's quite possible; you have terrific sex appeal.'

'You think they would give me just that as an assignment? I adore the Americans, and that I can do. Talk to this terrible colonel, but I'll have to think it over.'

'In my opinion it would be better to think it over first and then talk to the terrible colonel.'

'It would have to depend on a great many things. On the pay, on just what he proposes, what sort of work. If it's very dangerous, I'll have to think it over some more.'

When Edda had left, Schell went back up to the bar and ordered half a bottle of champagne. A horrible nightmare, he thought. But what can I do? Still, the colonel may not take her, he'll see through her immediately. But then he may, in order to get hold of me. . . . Oh, well, they'll simply kick her out of France. There's not much risk in it for her. . . . Still, it's not so good. . . .

Some cards were lying on the little table. One deck was lying stacked in a corner. He made a bet with himself: if red comes up I'll do it; if black, I won't. Mechanically he cut the cards, mechanically noticing the ace of hearts, picked up the cards, and the ace came out. Then he couldn't recall whether he had dropped it himself. That's settled.

CHAPTER THREE

IN appearance and manners Two doesn't resemble the other one, thought Schell; each one of them has his own 'style.' Nevertheless, they have something in common. . . . This one doesn't get down to business at once either, he also demonstrates the 'level of his intelligence.' But he prattles on quite a lot. Somehow he speaks oddly, unnaturally. There's something uneasy, tense, and a little provocative about him. *He* wouldn't visit me at home, nor play cards and eat with me. He must make appointments only in his office, or possibly in special cases in some deserted spot. He's probably very fond of 'plotting' and codes. His office here is the most ordinary kind, but with something military added. There's a coffee machine on the table over there. If he doesn't drink wine, he must be stimulated by coffee. Could there be a microphone here? Who listens in on him? The GPU? Oh, what a bore he is, death and damnation!

Schell was thinking his own thoughts without missing a word of what Colonel Number Two was saying. In his time Schell had done everything indicated: he could listen to two or even three conversations at the same time, pick a man he had seen once in his life out of a hundred photos, go in a flash from a dark room into a brightly lighted one and in that flash recognize with precision everything in it. In front of him at a large table sat a thin man of middle height with a long, sick, somewhat lopsided face, with small, yellowish, smouldering eyes.

On his left cheek, just below a dark ring underneath his eye, there was a wart, which made his dry face seem even more lopsided. The colonel didn't get up when Schell came in, just barely looking as though he were raising himself in his chair, stretched his hand across the table as though he were reluctant to, and with a fatigued if not disdainful gesture pointed to a chair on the other side of the table. When the colonel was sitting you couldn't see he was lame, but he did not sit quite normally. When he leaned across the table, a slight grimace of pain flitted across his face. They say he works fifteen hours a day. A lie, of course: no one works fifteen hours a day. But he may be overworked at that. . . . His eyes look intelligent. The cliché for them would be 'cruel.' No, probably just mean. His hands tremble a little, his face looks earthen. Is he affected, or just self-taught? And of course, there he is, 'casting a penetrating glance.' Very well, go on casting it: anything you penetrate is all yours. Probably he also considers himself a connoisseur of the human soul—another characteristic of the profession. But we are the professionals, he's more of a newcomer.

Nevertheless, Schell's ironic disposition and self-confidence diminished considerably in the East Sector of Berlin. I couldn't endure their arbitrariness, I should simply suffocate, I couldn't live with them, he said to himself. Just the same he was in the East Sector of the city often. He knew that in espionage circles he was considered fearless, and in fact he had often subjected himself to very great danger without losing his head; but he also knew that people who didn't know what fear was didn't exist.

Two must have been able to arrange things better, Schell thought, but probably the more uncomfortable it is the better he likes it. The room really was uncomfortable, regardless of the bright ceiling light. But it's a good thing he hasn't got that old trick; I stay in the dark and you're in a bright light. There was nothing on the table except a telephone (one instrument, not three, as they usually have) and an unlit lamp with a milk-coloured shade; there were neither papers, an inkwell, nor an ash tray. Along the walls, bare of hangings, there was a mountain range of metal cabinets. All of them, of course, with a secret lock. There was one small wall-cupboard, of wood, without a lock. There was a leather divan beneath it with a bump and a depression in the middle.

' . . . In the present epoch there are only two military-political colossi: the United States and Russia. Unfortunately, in all the statistical indices America is in the first place,' said the colonel, with irritation. 'For the time being we're only in second. But very soon it is we who will be first.'

'Yes, for the time being you're only in second,' agreed Schell. According to what one hears he's not very much attracted by women. Perhaps he likes redheads? Odd that Edda isn't a redhead naturally, it would have been so indicated for her. And if she charms him?

'You say "you"; surely you're a Russian?'

'I'm Argentinian. Would you like to see my passport?'

'What for? What does a passport prove? I could give you a passport for any country you liked. However, why not see it? Show it to me.'

Schell took a little booklet out of his pocket and handed it to the colonel, who leafed through it, as though negligently, and returned it. Of course he's noted both number and date.

'A nice little booklet,' said the colonel with a sneer. 'It opens the door to any country you like and doesn't arouse suspicions anywhere. I see you don't trust much to luck. So you're not a Russian, though you were born in Leningrad. There've always been very few Argentinians there, by the way.'

'Yes, a nice little booklet,' agreed Schell.

'I know all about you, of course,' said the colonel, emphasizing the 'all.' 'I've heard a great deal, Count Saint-Germain. I've heard of your feats and I admire them.' Schell nodded silently. 'It's true you've done a great deal of work for small countries. . . . Well, how about it then? Have you made up your mind?'

'I'll give you an answer in three weeks.'

'Why the delay? What is holding you back?'

'It's just that it's time to get out of this business.'

'Don't tell me your nerve is failing?' asked the colonel, with unconcealed satisfaction.

'No, my nerve isn't failing,' answered Schell hastily. 'I'm tired of the work.'

The colonel looked at him with astonishment. 'Tired of it?'

'It's become repellent.'

'I never thought you were particularly idealistic.'

'No. Wasn't it the Russian writer Pisemsky who said that in his own and in everyone else's soul he never saw anything but filth?'

The astonishment on the colonel's face grew still more marked. He couldn't understand why a man who evidently wished to work for him should say that. Schell 'didn't understand why he said it either. I've started making superfluous remarks; before, I never did.

• 'Pisemsky must have had a very bad time of it. . . . Perhaps his nerves were in disorder, just like yours? It would be a little early for you, nevertheless, though you're not so young. A boxer or dancer can only work until about thirty; people who work with their heads keep much better. . . . Let's get down to business.'

'You expressed a wish to speak to me tonight.'

'I don't recall that I expressed such a wish,' said the colonel, emphasizing the 'I.' 'Is it only the money side of the work that interests you?'

'I take various circumstances into account: who pays more, where there is less risk, where it is more agreeable to work, where the superiors are more polite.'

'If I were to take you on it would only be for a long time and only for very dangerous assignments. I would send you to America.'

'In peacetime there are no such dangerous assignments anywhere.'

'You think so? You're used to working with democratic windbags. But you know we don't stand on ceremony.'

I suppose he wanted to propose that I become a double agent, thought Schell. But he wasn't very much interested in any proposition the colonel might have for him: he had definitely made up his mind not to work for *them*.

'As for what we *pay* our agents,' said the colonel, 'we also take into account various circumstances, aside from experience and ability. You are a very expensive agent, you're not Russian, you have no principles. You're a gambler, you're too well known in intelligence circles, your height and looks attract too much attention. . . . If you still can't give me any answer then it's obvious that your wanting to see me was a misunderstanding.'

'I wanted to talk about a certain woman, not about myself.' •

'The one you dined with last night in a Kurfürstendamm restaurant?' asked the colonel. 'A very beautiful woman.'

'That's the one.'

'Isn't her name Edda? Well, in principle I don't object, but I'm not going to talk to her for the fun of it. Haven't I heard she's a poetess? We don't need poetesses. Nor do we need fools.'

'She's not a fool. And as you very rightly observed, she's extremely beautiful.'

'Of course that's important.'

'Aside from which she speaks excellent French, German, and English.'

'Also very important. But you understand that you yourself are one thing and this lady is another. I believe she has no experience?'

'None.'

'Is she your mistress?'

'My private life concerns no one but myself.'

'It doesn't concern us *now*. But as you must understand

if you or she starts working for us then everything that concerns you will concern us, or at least everything that might be of interest to us. We're not going to pay *her* a lot. In Berlin she's of no use to us.'

'She can go anywhere you please. To New York, for instance, or even better to Paris.'

'All our agents want to go to Paris.'

'In Paris you're sure to have some work for her. Basically there are only two places where there are any military secrets: in Washington and in Rocquencourt, that is, in the Pentagon and in SHAPE. In my opinion it's easier to find them out in the latter. After all, there are people of fourteen nationalities there.'

'Thanks for this invaluable information.'

'Of course you have agents everywhere. Nevertheless, a beautiful woman, with an excellent command of foreign languages, may be useful.'

He's ready to betray his own mistress, thought the colonel. A fine fellow! 'And you wouldn't be too upset if she were to trip up?'

'That's a risk of our trade.'

'Of course, if she's caught, the French will probably simply deport her. Maybe that's just why it's "better in Paris," eh? But you know we have a rule—they or us. What guarantee is there that she's not a double agent?'

'There's never a guarantee. That's a risk of *your* trade,' Schell replied dryly.

'I hope you realize we don't beat around the bush with double agents.'

'Really, everyone knows that,' said Schell, 'so there's

no point repeating it. Why frighten people? She's a beginner; how could she be a double agent?' .

'You mean she'd be suitable only as a plain agent? Very well, we can take her on trial. . . . And as a supplement to yourself I should even take her on very willingly. Aren't you going to ask me about conditions?'

'That's premature. After all, I still haven't given you an answer in principle.'

In principle! thought the colonel. Fine principles he must have! Schell annoyed him. Moreover, during the past few years all strong, healthy people aroused the colonel's ill-will, especially very tall people. From early youth his ugliness had been the cross of his life. He would have liked to be externally just such a man as Schell; he respected physical strength, and strength in general. Now on top of all this he was half an invalid. This specimen, of course, is a traitor on 'principle.' The colonel would have *liked* to feel revulsion toward him, but he did not. He would have *liked* Schell to have, for instance, a thin, piping voice, like that of some other giants, Bismarck or Turgeniev; but Schell's voice was perfectly ordinary, though not very pleasing.

'There'll be no trouble about money. We won't pay less than the *others*, but even more if there's something to pay for. Good-bye. I'll wait three weeks. Three weeks and no more,' said the colonel, and again pretended to raise himself in his chair.

In theory the colonel, like so many other Soviet people, unhesitatingly maintained that life was made for pleasure (the thing to say was 'pleasure in work,' or something like

that). In fact, his life had never been pleasurable, not even in youth: at that time because of being poor and overburdened with work. Nor had he married, primarily because there had never been time, a flat, or money. Now he was living 'ascetically' (the word pleased him), and consoled himself with the thought that he was living for his country. But that was what many people said, though he knew that most of them were deceiving themselves or simply lying: they were of no use whatever to their country. He himself had thought during the past years that he was undoing the intrigues of Russia's enemies; now, however, he realized that incomparably more intrigues were being woven against others by the Soviet government. In principle he saw nothing inadmissible in this: hadn't the world always been that way? Nevertheless, a great many things displeased him, and especially the people who dealt with all that sort of thing. He had no close friends either in Berlin or in Russia. He almost never gave any receptions or parties. Since the time of his severe wound women scarcely occupied a place in his life; how could they like man a who was lame, crippled, and on top of that ugly?

He had been ambitious, especially before: rank and decorations, especially for combat, gave him a great deal of pleasure. Now both the decorations and his pleasure from them were very slight. In his new job nearly everything was vile, or at best involved something vile, but every now and then interesting problems could crop up. Some of these problems, those he had managed to solve, ended up with death sentences. But that was no concern of his, and he never thought about it.

Thus only one thing remained satisfying—chess. He had been passionately attracted to it when young. Now he took a miniature chessboard out of its box, turned on the table lamp, and started examining a problem he had composed not long before.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN spite of all Natasha's fears her trip went off very well. She had scarcely ever travelled, knew no Italian, and even spoke French badly, but Schell had given her a precise itinerary, explained everything in detail, taken her to the station, and given her a bouquet which was quite out of place in the third class. They embraced. 'So I'll be in Capri, Sunday,' he said.

She got into the carriage, barely holding back her tears, and when the train was already chugging out from under the glass roof he was still looking after her, holding his hat high over his head in his left hand and blowing her kisses.

All the places in her compartment were taken. She didn't want to relinquish the bouquet, but it was awkward holding it on her knees the whole trip; she put it on the rack above her small, threadbare suitcase. Now we must be bridegroom and bride, she repeated to herself. After all, if he came to the station, and we kissed again. . . . Still, he didn't propose. . . .

She didn't go to the dining-car, which seemed to her like the last word in luxury; she had never seen such a car from the inside. For that matter, maybe they don't let people in from the third class. . . . She didn't feel like reading, and her books were in the suitcase. How could I get them out in front of everybody? And they'll see that the book is in Russian! But she didn't like sitting down without doing anything. Probably they don't let you knit in the cars. The opposite row of seats was taken

up by a German family with a very sweet little girl. Natasha adored children and would have started talking to the little girl if the father hadn't been sitting there: she was afraid of people, especially of men, and especially of Germans. 'You have a real inferiority complex,' Schell had told her more than once, with tenderness and indignation. 'What can I do about it?' Natasha had answered. 'It all comes from the German underground factory. They had specialists there in driving that complex into you. With lashes.'

She took off her cheap gloves, which were worn out so completely at the fingertips they weren't worth mending, and real charmois ones were impossibly expensive. She had been saving every mark and putting it aside for the trip to Italy. Her stipendium was very small; she had also been making some scarves for a Berlin department store, and could also make hats; she sewed her own dresses. She had hands of gold. 'I can't do water colours, that's for old-fashioned young ladies of quality,' she said to Schell. 'But as for mending, I can do anything, I wash linen excellently, as well as my own head.' Schell listened with mixed feelings. He loved elegant women and couldn't understand why he had fallen in love with Natasha.

At the Italian border a customs official, after a swift glance at Natasha and her suitcase, did not examine her things. Another official scrutinized her Soviet passport with curiosity. She was asked further about money, and she pulled her twenty-five thousand lire out of her bag and said she was going to Italy for no more than two weeks, just as a tourist. The official nodded with a smile.

And there she was, over the border, without the slightest unpleasantness! Suddenly she was overcome by an extraordinary joy.

Now everything became different, and the people were different. New passengers opened up food parcels and Natasha, after some hesitation, did the same. They started talking with her, and she answered in broken French. They were all extremely amiable. An Italian woman offered her an orange; an old man asked her whether she would not like some wine. Oh, how nice they are! In general, people are nice. . . . Of course there are nasty ones, she thought, recalling the underground factory, but they're the exceptions. And that's not going to happen any more. And I'm not going to have tuberculosis either; after all, the infection has begun in only one lung. . . . And he's going to propose. . . .

A Berlin physician had told her about the infection that was beginning in her lung; Schell had almost forced her to go to him. The words 'the beginning of an infection in the left lung' sounded much better than the terrible word 'tuberculosis.' Nevertheless, they alarmed her. But Schell, who questioned the doctor about her, explained to her that it was all nonsense and she calmed down at once. Later, to be sure, he said that it would be good for her to take a trip to Italy anyhow, where even the 'beginning of an infection' would vanish at once.

'What are you talking about? Do you think I'm a Wall Street agent living here incognito? You don't imagine my allowance is going to be enough?'

'Have no fears about money, my dear little Wall Street agent, I'll get you as much as you want,' he had replied.

Natasha appreciated his delicacy: 'I'll get you'—that is, he was going to give her his own. To be sure, he was rich, he had a big commission business. 'What is a commission business, Eugene Karlovitch?' she had asked. What she didn't like in Schell was his drinking wine, his eternal jokes, and even his name. She tried not to call him by name at all, but when she quickly hurried over 'Eugene' she blushed painfully.

They were going to Italy separately. Schell referred to business affairs that could not be put off and promised to come to Capri in three days at the latest. Natasha sadly told herself that this was because he did not want to travel third class.

' . . . I'll find myself some very cheap little pension and you live wherever you like, but not with me. Even then people there may think God knows what about us!'

He agreed with a smile. Even after their embraces, Natasha still refused to accept his money. It was only in the restaurants that she consented to his paying. She had heard that in restaurants it was always the gentleman who paid for the ladies, even for the rich ones.

On Capri she found an extremely cheap pension. On the way from the station she visited two—French was more or less understood everywhere—and then chose a third, the cheapest. They gave her a tiny sunlit room with whitewashed walls, a majolica floor with white squares bordered in black which always seemed moist, a very clean bed, and a chair at the window looking out into a garden. The first thing Natasha did was to put the withered bouquet into water.

CHAPTER FIVE

AFTER another interview with Schell, Colonel Number One decided to go to Paris. The trip had no connection with the Maikov affair, which had been imposed on him and didn't interest him very much. This time he had another scheme, of his own, which was rather more important. He had to talk it over with a general who occupied a high position in Rocquencourt. This general was a school comrade of his and in spite of the difference that had formed with years in their ranks and reputations they were still friends.

The colonel was particularly punctilious in matters where official and personal interests imperceptibly merged. That was what this affair was about. The woman recommended to him by Schell was supposed to play a role in it, but his nephew, a young officer attached to SHAPE in the Public Information Division, was also supposed to participate. He had to put in a request for his nephew in Rocquencourt and the colonel did not find this altogether agreeable.

During the war there had been one intelligence project (since become famous) that was extremely complicated and difficult, and that had had enormous historical consequences. The Allies had thrown into the sea near Spanish shores a corpse that seemed to be that of an officer who had died with papers containing information about their landings in Europe. As had been expected,

the corpse drifted ashore, the Spanish authorities passed the documents to the Germans and they got to Hitler himself, who was taken in by the misinformation. This was one of the causes of the German catastrophe. For imagination, for boldness of conception, for dramatic effect, for the technical perfection of execution, and most of all for results, the colonel considered this enterprise an unprecedented masterpiece in the history of intelligence. He knew about it in great detail, but had had nothing to do with it. He would have liked to conclude his career with some such undertaking. In peacetime, to be sure, a similar intrigue was impossible; but the colonel's misinformation project might be enormously important if it came off. And there was a good chance of success. Two was bound to swallow it. It's a pity that from what Schell says she's stupid, but he did say he had complete control over her.

At first the colonel had not liked Schell. At their first meeting he had almost thought the agent was one of those people who like the reputation of good-for-nothings and boast of it. The colonel had met a great many like that; he found the species particularly repulsive. Afterward his opinion of Schell improved. He saw so much evil in life that with the years he had become more and more indulgent. There's no doubt he's an extremely valuable agent. . . . Strange that he plays the 'cello. A little unusual for an agent to have a soul. But he'd be very useful anyhow, no matter how this Maikov business ends up. And does Jim have to be brought into it? A light-minded kid. But it's time to get him out among people or he's going to turn into a worthless playboy.

We'll try it out and see. For the time being there's nothing to worry about.

The general listened to the colonel's report very attentively, making intelligent comments and asking business-like questions from which it was clear that he understood everything from the first word on. He approved highly of the colonel's scheme.

' . . . Yes, that would be splendid. Let's try it. They may go for something new. I don't think they've shown any interest in the furnace yet. And if this young charmer is attractive, the youngster can amuse himself at the same time. I have nothing against it. Tomorrow I'll make arrangements for his transfer. In any case he won't be any more useless than in what he's working at now.'

As always, the colonel left this office somewhat reassured. Occasionally, at bad moments, it occurred to him that the world situation was essentially hopeless—oddly enough for both sides. Now he told himself that very important matters were in the hands of a very able man who knew his trade thoroughly.

As a man whom the general had talked to for almost an hour, he was conducted out very respectfully and promised that his nephew would be called immediately. The working day was already ending.

His nephew Jim, a handsome young lieutenant, appeared at once. He had not been expecting his uncle and was delighted to see him. The colonel was fond of Jim, who had been left in his charge as a child. Toward his uncle Jim preserved the amiable condescension of a

young man beginning life toward an old man finishing his career. He appreciated his solicitude and generosity, knew he could depend on him utterly, and listened respectfully to his constant admonitions. All this might be stretched to mean that he loved him, but the colonel did not delude himself. After my death he'll be a little sad; it may even take him a little while to be consoled by his inheritance of thirty thousand dollars, not counting the house in Connecticut, which he'll soon sell, he thought with a sigh.

'Will you be staying long?'

'I'm leaving the day after tomorrow. I'd like to invite you to a good dinner tonight. I hope you're free? We have to have a very serious talk.'

'Actually I'm not,' Jim replied, hesitating slightly, 'but for you and for a good dinner, of course, I'll free myself, in spite of your very serious talk. I was supposed to dine with friends. I'll phone them at once.'

'Yes, phone her. What's the best restaurant here?'

'Here? You're not thinking of treating me to one of the local restaurants! I'll take you to Paris.'

'Fine. But show me your furnace before dinner.'

'What furnace?'

'The one where they burn the documents. Surely it's close by?'

'Why do you want to look at the furnace?'

'None of your business. Out of curiosity.'

There was nothing interesting about the square, rather low brick furnace. A reddish flame was shooting up in it as though something were just being burned.

'There's something symbolic in this,' said Jim, raising a finger with a triumphant look. 'Here the world's evil is being burnt!'

'Just a little less nonsense from you,' said the colonel, but very amiably.

CHAPTER SIX

‘. . . How are all your love affairs?’ asked the colonel as they were finishing dinner. ‘You wrote me you had broken up with her.’

Jim told him the truth about his intimate relations; at least the colonel thought so, and it made him happy. ‘We got tired of each other. She got angry about something or other.’

‘So just now you’re not in love with anybody? In any case, you’re not getting ready to get married?’

‘Oh, no! What d’you take me for, Uncle?’ asked Jim indignantly.

‘Very well, now let’s get down to business. Are you still as bored with your work as ever?’

‘Of course I am. Why, actually, did you ever have me assigned to it?’

The colonel kept silent a moment. ‘Would you like to work in the same department as myself?’

‘So that’s it! You want me to work with you!’

‘Not with me. I simply want to give you one assignment. You would stay on at your post.’

‘Is that possible?’

‘It’s done. You would be temporarily detached from your work and assigned elsewhere. Then we’ll see. Today I asked the general for his agreement. He doesn’t know you.’

‘I’ve been introduced to him twice!’

‘A lot of people are introduced to him, he can’t know all of you. All he remembered was that I had a nephew

here. Actually, the fact that I even brought you up with him was something of a breach of regulations. But we're old friends. I told him what I needed and he gave his agreement, or rather promised to shut his eyes.'

'You don't want to assign me to something illegal?'

'A great many of our activities overlook the rules somewhat. Nevertheless, the general's attitude toward the project was favourable. He asked me whether you're good-looking.'

'What's this all about! Are there women mixed up in it?'

'Not women, a woman.'

'Beautiful?'

'Very. Don't be too happy too soon; she's a spy. She's being sent here to find out some of our military secrets. Before continuing I want you to promise me faithfully: all this is to remain absolutely secret.'

'I swear by my life!' said Jim solemnly, starting to raise his hand.

The colonel frowned. 'You're a daredevil and don't have too much regard for your life. Instead of swearing simply give me your word of honour as an American officer that everything I tell you will remain an absolute secret.'

'Of course I give you my word.'

'In order to enter our department you'll have to undergo various formalities, there's no point talking about them now. Just now the question is about one trial project. If you fulfil my assignment well it will be possible to discuss your coming over to work for us. It's very hard work, but it's more interesting than what you're doing now.'

'How did you find out they're sending this beauty over here?'

'In our department it's not done to ask superiors whatever they don't tell you themselves. We can't use exclusively legal methods. . . . It would be up to you to start a liaison with this woman.'

Jim opened his eyes wide. 'I never thought I would hear such words from you. You were just asking me whether I intended to get married!'

'That was why I asked. If you were in love, I should never have suggested this business to you.'

'What if I don't like your little spy? What then?'

'A stupid question. No, actually, maybe it's better for you to stick to your own department.'

'Where is this Hecuba? How do I get acquainted with her?'

'I'll give you her description, tell you where she lives, and in what restaurant she eats. It would be best to get acquainted with her at the restaurant itself. The rest is your own affair. You'll have to take her to Rocquencourt and show her, as a journalist, that furnace. It is shown to journalists. The person in charge of the furnace will be you, at least in a few days from now. Then you will "fall in love" and pass on to her a number of documents which we will prepare for you.'

'I understand: misinformation!'

'That will be the end of your role.'

'A queer role. I never expected this of you!'

'Things like this have to be done. If it's done for your country, there's nothing bad about it.'

'Up to now I've even had affairs with beautiful women not for my country. For my country I'm all the readier.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE moment the little steamship came to rest, Natasha, who had already been walking up and down on the shore for an hour, saw Schell and ran toward him along the rampart, overtaking the porters with their barrows. He raised his hand, swiftly strode over to her, embraced and kissed her. He smelled of wine.

'You look wonderful. Is everything all right? D'you like Capri?'

'It's just heaven!'

'Not always. Everything on the island depends on the weather. If the weather's bad, it's mortally depressing.'

'The weather's been wonderful the whole time. And how are you?'

'You haven't been coughing?'

'I haven't coughed once,' she replied gaily, although the question upset her a little—it meant he wasn't sure it was all nonsense after all.

'Thank God,' he said, and started talking Italian to the porter who had brought his suitcases from the steamer.

Schell didn't stop at the best hotel; he said he might meet people he knew there.

'And I don't want to see anybody but you. There's a very good inn not far off, where I lived three years ago. We'll ask there.'

He was known at the inn. The innkeeper offered them a separate cottage, rather far off, at the bottom of a large, steeply sloping garden.

'The signora is not my wife,' Schell explained. 'She already has a room. Well, take us to this cottage.'

All three of them descended the steep old stone staircase into the garden. The cottage was also old; it consisted of a very large room with three windows, two bedrooms, marble statues, and huge fireplaces.

When the innkeeper left, Schell took Natasha in his arms again. 'D'you want to live here with me? I'll think up something to tell him, but for that matter they really don't care at all.'

'Never. You know that . . .'

'Yes, I know, I know,' he said impatiently. 'Very well, let's not quarrel. I have to bathe, shave, and change. It'll take at least half an hour. Will you wait for me here, or over there in the hotel?'

'It's not quite convenient,' said Natasha, blushing. Schell burst out laughing.

'"What will they think," is that it? O wonder of nature! Were you brought up in a boarding-house for well-born maidens somewhere in Spain? Well, if it isn't proper for you to wait for me here, go to the Piazza Umberto and sit in a café on the terrace. I think there are only a few cafés and I'll find you.'

Whenever he tore himself away from his gloomy espionage world, Schell always felt great relief. Now he really did not want to see anyone but Natasha. People irritated him. In the train the people in his compartment had aroused something in him very close to repugnance.

He thought about Natasha again. It's as though my heart were lit up from within! What a banal business!

I've got myself completely entangled! I've turned out to be not just a scoundrel but a damned fool, too. I don't know myself what I want. I'm madly in love! Oh, no, in love, but not madly! We'll see what happens when we meet. Will I be disappointed, even a little?

• He had been drinking in the dining-car, at the station, and even on the little boat from Naples. The test had gone off splendidly; he wasn't disappointed in the least.

But nevertheless, in the bathtub now, he sensed reviving in him a cast of emotion that tormented him. At the age of forty a man can't fall in love like Romeo. . . . Yes, I have to admit I thought up this whole trip to Capri in order to *make* her. But I cannot, I simply *cannot*, do that now. Does that mean I'll marry her? That's all she wants, that's all she dreams about, and keeps trying not to show it, poor sweet. . . . Get married, with my past, in my profession, and having to hide everything from her?

Three months before the notion of marrying Natasha had seemed grotesque. Then, little by little his feelings passed into another channel; first cynical and *mocking*, they turned repentant. It's true, I was desolate. But generally speaking there are very few 'fallen' people, people fall and rise. My path led from good to evil—could I be on the way back now? . . . Get married? By now that's almost impossible, even practically. How can I get married when I have no money and can get some only by staying a spy?

The colonel had offered to give him an advance of two thousand dollars. Schell actually did set less value on his life than the great majority of people, and the assignment was an interesting one. And, most of all, if he was success-

ful, a sum was assured him which might very well allow him to abandon his occupation, of which he had long since tired, and which was dangerous and exhausting. The job would take about three or four weeks, he thought. Let's say I could think up some pretext for Natasha. I'll tell her I have to take a trip to liquidate my affairs. I'll leave her five hundred dollars. Like that blasted Edda, he thought with revulsion. What address could I give her for letters? And how could I write to her? . . . But if the thing comes off, everything will be all right. Then it will be possible to go on hiding things from her. . . . Oh, I don't feel like going away. . . . And I'm afraid. . . . Of course I'm afraid. There's not much of a chance of coming back from there. But what else can I do? If only there were a little money, I could run off to South America. . . . Tell Natasha straight out that I'm ruined, that I haven't a thing left? She would probably fling herself around my neck and tell me in raptures that it's much better that way and that she was going to work. . . . Or else tell her the whole truth? . . . But of course that's out of the question! And I'm not going to think about it any more here on Capri. I'm not going to spoil these two weeks for myself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JIM left Edda's hotel toward dawn. Should I send Uncle a telegram? For instance: I came, I saw, I conquered. But he didn't. In the street he quickly sobered up and no longer thought there was anything to joke about.

But he had done everything very well. At one in the afternoon he had gone into the restaurant indicated to him by his uncle and had recognized Edda immediately: the colonel had received her picture from Schell. He was very agitated; he had never seen a spy before in his life. All the tables were taken. Jim walked down the long room, went back, put on an irritated look, then stopped, and in French asked the young woman for permission to sit down at her table. He sat down, overcoming his revulsion and fear, as though there were some serpent in front of him. After a moment's silence Jim asked whether he might look at the menu.

Edda, also agitated—it's come off!—answered in English that she didn't need the menu any longer, she had already ordered. Almost smiling, she nevertheless preserved her 'inaccessible' expression. The colonel had not had a picture of Jim, but he had described him to Schell with great precision. Ninety chances to a hundred he's the one! thought Edda. Oh, how well it's worked out! Schell, to be sure, had told her that the American officer had lunch in this restaurant every day—but really it had come off: he had sat down all by himself!

Such a lucky coincidence might have seemed suspicious, but with Edda suspicion didn't even raise its head.

Really, by her looks, she's a fool, Jim thought happily. Really, by his looks, he's a fool, Edda thought happily. But what if he isn't the one. It's not such a tragedy, it'll just be a pleasant acquaintance. Both of them hastily mapped out a plan of campaign.

'You speak English very well,' Jim improvised.

'I've been taught languages ever since I was a child; my uncle owned a large hotel. I'm a Swiss journalist,' Edda replied. That was what Schell had instructed her to say. Though perhaps I shouldn't tell him all this in the very first breath?

Jim explained immediately that his own aunt owned a hotel in Atlanta. He had no aunt, but in his opinion it was up to a spy to lie as often and as much as possible; you simply had to keep everything in mind.

'Her name is Mildred Russell. A wonderful woman.'

'Isn't Atlanta in the United States? Are you an American?'

'I'm an American officer, on duty at SHAPE.' Jim also thought that he shouldn't have told all this in the very first breath, but just the day before he had decided to carry out the affair at the pace of Julius Caesar.

So there's no doubt at all! thought Edda.

'Have you been in Paris long?' Jim asked.

'I arrived the day before yesterday.'

'For the first time?'

'Oh, no, I know Paris very well.'

'Me, too. I've been here for two years' (it had been only a year). 'Let me introduce myself. . . .'

He gave his name. Edda gave the new name she had on her passport, which she had gotten through Schell. Her face kept growing more and more clever and wily and his kept growing more and more straightforward and honest. (His face always radiated straightforwardness and honesty when he was lying to beautiful women.)

'So you're on duty at SHAPE? What's that?' asked Edda. Her question seemed to her very subtle. Mata Hari herself could hardly have done it more craftily. 'I've never heard the word.'

'Not really?' asked Jim, and explained to her what it meant.

'So that's it? Oh, I'm so remote from all that. And who is the American Supreme Commander?'

Either she's a complete idiot, or else she has a very cunning scheme, thought Jim, but what sort of scheme could it be? If all Soviet spies are like her, then the United States isn't threatened by any great danger.

A waiter came over. Jim ordered an expensive wine and the most recherché dishes this second-class restaurant had. He thought this useful for business; besides, he always felt like eating and drinking. Edda had only a tiny bottle of mineral water in front of her. He asked permission to pour her some wine. By the time lunch was over they were chattering merrily away. Complete frolicsomeness was not yet there, but it was swiftly approaching.

'Would you like to spend an evening with me? I implore you, don't say you're busy.'

'I won't. I'm not busy.'

They went to the theatre and afterwards sat in a café on the heated terrace.

'I'll order some champagne. Would you like some?' He asked her in French, in order to be able to say 'tu' to her.

'Champagne? All you Americans say "champagne,"' she mimicked him, although he had only a very slight accent. 'But who drinks champagne, just like that, on a café terrace?'

'I feel like it!' he declared in the peremptory tone that had often been so successful with women. He ordered champagne with the air of a wealthy tourist, which became him very well and pleased Edda enormously.

'Your face looks ecstatic!' he said as the bottle neared its end. 'I, of course, am accustomed to arousing such feelings in women, but do try not to show them, it's not proper.'

'You're stupid, very stupid, remarkably stupid. . . . And what if I fell in love with you?'

'I should take it under advisement,' Jim replied. His 'technique' actually didn't change merely because he was dealing with a spy. He told a risqué anecdote. Edda countered with one that was quite improper. Then he asked her to read him her verses. 'But of course not here!'

'Then let's go to my hotel.'

'Is it possible at your place?'

'This is a free country,' she replied, by now laughing half-drunkenly. Edda was convinced that all Americans spoke this way constantly, on any and all occasions.

She had a corner suite of two rooms. There were no neighbours, and in spite of how late it was they could be

quite free and easy. And so they were. Over cognac (Jim had prudently brought along a pocket flask) Edda read him her French verses. She read them sometimes stretching her hands out in front of her, sometimes raising them to the ceiling, gracefully leaning forward and then back. These gestures, especially the last one, had an effect on him. He was also affected by the verses.

She was seated kneeling near him and 'worming secrets out of him.' He considered whether he shouldn't worm some secret out of her, but recalled that that wasn't part of his assignment: his uncle had ordered him not to ask about anything; he was simply supposed—not, of course, instantly—to tell her his own secret, to 'confide' to her that there was a furnace in Rocquencourt where the most important top-secret documents were burned.

CHAPTER NINE

'I THINK that's the eighth tangerine you're eating,' Natasha said, 'and you're even swallowing the pips! That's dangerous. There was no point in your buying so many downstairs.'

'No point at all,' he replied distractedly, and thought that no one ever before had paid attention to his health. Yes, it will be a petty-bourgeois life, he thought.

Everything he had thought out en route to Capri had been realized with precision. Through the proprietor he had hired a troupe of male and female dancers and three musicians. They lived next door to the hotel and usually arranged a tarantella for tourists in their own small house. During the day Schell took Natasha to the Blue Grotto. In spite of the cold weather, he went for a swim there; he had put on a bathing costume under his jacket that he thought most suitable for showing off his gigantic figure. Then the boatman took them to a restaurant looking out on the sea, where they dined; he drank two bottles of wine and made Natasha drink a few glasses; she was soon quite dizzy. At dinner he talked about his surprise party. There was going to be a tarantella, the famous folk dance, a specialty of Naples and Capri, on the theme of which great composers had written masterpieces. He added that his own life was downright tarantism; he spoke more expansively and coarsely than usual because of the wine and his excitement: he was sure everything would be consummated that night.

At ten o'clock they went into the room of the little

house, lit up by varicoloured small lanterns. Near the lavishly laden table they were greeted with deferential dignity by the actors and actresses. The tarantella began, which really did turn into a frenzy very rapidly. Hesitating for the last time, Schell leaned toward her and asked, •‘Natasha, will you marry me? I’ve looked into everything, there won’t be very many formalities, but I can’t wait, I simply cannot wait any longer!’

Suddenly the sounds of the tarantella were interrupted, and the principal dancer, breathing heavily, went over to them and asked for permission to kiss the signora’s hand. The buffet keeper brought over a tray with goblets of champagne. Then, accompanied by the troupe, which was delighted with them, they went into the little garden drenched in moonlight. The whole arsenal of poetry, thought Schell. He was still making an effort to think cynically, but was almost as happy as Natasha. She can hardly stand on her feet. Why not just carry her into the bedroom in my arms? he thought. No. . . . But he carried her out in his arms.

Schell had already told the colonel that he was going to accept his proposition, and had asked him to send the two thousand dollars to a Swiss bank where he had had an account for years. Asking for an advance was always disagreeable; it lowered his standing. Now it was even more disagreeable: he had definitely made up his mind not to go to Moscow under any circumstances. Even if I go broke, I’ll get the money later, I’ll give it back to him! But he had no idea at all of where he would get it; he did not even know where to begin looking.

CHAPTER TEN

Two alternatives had been indicated to Edda. According to the first she was skilfully to abstract the secret documents from Jim, have them photographed (she had been told where), Jim was to be left pure, and everything would be in perfect order. The difficulty was in *how* to abstract them. For a long time Edda racked her brains but could think of nothing. Mustn't he take them directly to the furnace from his office? Doubtless Schell would be able to think of a plan. Should I ask the Soviet colonel? But he's such a boor; and it would ruin my prestige. She had already sent off to the colonel by indicated methods her first triumphant report. She painstakingly put it into code, for which a bulky lexicon had been given her.

The second variant was far more dramatic: Jim was supposed to be *seduced*. She turned over the details in her mind. Wine, a great deal of wine. And then—an orgy? (On the orgy theme she had already conceived a poem.) Then tell Jim *everything*: 'I am a spy! I was assigned to track you down and through you find out all of Rocquencourt's secrets! But I never became a spy for the sake of money, but by conviction: the Communists are right, they're going to save the world from the horrors of another war, they must be helped! But now I've had a stroke of bad luck—I've suddenly fallen in love with you. Now you make all the decisions. If you wish to, slay me! If you wish to tell your superiors, let them punish me! But if you love

me, break with your past, share my ideas, and we'll toil together. . . .'

This variant moved Edda to tears. But it, too, had serious shortcomings. Jim said that he was madly in love with her, which, for that matter, was quite obvious. Nevertheless, she was not sure of how he would behave. Suppose he really does kill me then and there, though it's hardly likely. No, he'll get up and leave. Then I'll fly back to Germany immediately. If he's such a cad that he'll go off to report me at night—no, at night it's impossible, there's no one around, he'll wait until morning—in any case, I'll be able to escape in time. Then the colonel won't give me any more money, but I won't return what I have left. And if Jim agrees—he can't help but agree, he's so in love with me!—then everything will be wonderful. We'll get the documents, get the money, and go off to Italy. There, to be sure there was another complication. She would be very glad to go off to Italy with Jim, but she didn't want to be separated from Schell for too long a time. If I don't watch him he may simply evaporate. . . .

But no matter what happened there was no doubt that what was going on was the *play of life*. She decided to reflect a bit more. She marked a date for the orgy, in case the second variant turned up: March 13, which was a Friday—the coincidence of a fateful number with a fateful day—she was flinging a challenge at destiny. . . . She spent some time visualizing it all; first he sobbed, then he sank to his knees in front of her and swore to renounce his past, his people, his parents, his brothers. Then they drank champagne again and she read him

her poetry. Then they set off for Venice and in the evening, under the moon, they embraced, floating in a gondola. . . .

It was the second variant that materialized, with a negligible deviation from the projected programme. Edda didn't buy any champagne, it was too *gay* a wine. She got a bottle of cognac instead. That also made it cheaper—the colonel hadn't given her much money. Meanwhile, there were a great many expenses. For the orgy she bought a nightgown of black crêpe de Chine with sleeves, very long and cut like a dress; she had been dreaming of something like it for a long time; also, it was more suitable than pyjamas; she paid ten thousand francs for it. Edda had thought spies could lay out money without thinking twice; it turned out not to be so.

Everything turned out brilliantly well. Jim took her to Rocquencourt and showed her the furnace, producing a thick packet which was burned before their eyes. She saw that he was in charge of it. Their fifth night together Edda—not, to be sure, very apropos—started speaking rapturously of the Russian music and ballet. Jim agreed with her in all sincerity. Then she said that contemporary Russia was being maligned. He did not dispute this, either; there was a good deal of maligning going on. She abused the United States government; he supported her. Ten minutes later Edda declared that she was serving the Soviet régime, which was bearing peace and happiness to all nations. Jim did not seize her by the throat. Another five minutes and he was on his knees in front of her crying that her people would be his people, that for him there was now neither father nor mother nor brothers

(which, for that matter, he had really not had). Jim knew he wasn't acting very well, and his astonishment kept growing. How can such a simpleton be a spy?

' . . . I'll bring you one very important piece of information,' he said, panting, 'but it'll have to be thrown into the furnace the same day. Your people had better have it photographed very quickly.'

'Not "your" people, but ours! You're one of us now! We will toil together!'

'For you I'm betraying my country! Now I have no one but you! We'll run away together!'

Jim got a letter from his uncle. The colonel congratulated him on his success and told him there would be an important package for the goose and that it had to be handed over without fail on March 18. 'I see you have pangs of conscience. But remember that you're not doing this for yourself but for your country,' wrote the colonel, squeezing out the pompous words with difficulty. 'Aside from which this fool is not in any danger. Let her leave France for wherever she likes. Judging by what you tell me about her she's of no further use to us. Try to get rid of her as quickly as possible. If necessary, you can also leave with her for a short time. You'll be given a furlough and money. I should prefer that you broke up immediately, but if it's impossible *otherwise* (underlined twice) go to Italy with her and leave her there. Give her as much as you think necessary. At your leisure you can think over whether you want to work in our section in the future, too. I'll soon be in Italy also, by the way. We might meet in Venice.'

The package really was very important. Locking himself in his office and seeing almost no one, the colonel worked for a whole day and part of the night, experiencing a feeling very close to what is called inspiration. In his profession there was a preponderance of sombre base prose that often poisoned his life, but at times he also found an authentic poetry in his work, so extraordinary sometimes were the schemes, complications, combinations, and psychological play. The misinformation referred to atom bombs, to their number, strength, and distribution. Everything was put together extremely skilfully, especially the letter from the Pentagon to the Saceur. It was the *magnum opus* of the colonel's life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SCHELL and Natasha were married in Naples. He told her that they would be going to Venice for a honeymoon. He smiled involuntarily; these words were so inept, especially after the wedding—their witness was the hall porter of the hotel. Natasha said she was in raptures, but at heart she would have liked it better if they settled down as soon as possible, settled down stably, it didn't matter where, as long as they settled down.

Natasha could not get used to doing nothing for her husband. Everything remained as it had been. They lived in hotels and ate at restaurants; she had no worries about managing, since there was nothing to manage. Schell even unpacked by himself. She told him she was not bad at mending laundry, but he replied that he threw out everything that was the least bit torn. Nor could she help him in his business; she knew nothing about it; perhaps he had no business. If only he would dictate letters to me. He has a good handwriting, but strange: firm and at the same time changeable, as though different people were writing. . . . And after all how can a woman not know exactly what her husband's business is? It's simply unheard of! Of course he did tell me it was all 'episodic middle-man deals,' but he said it evasively. And what can 'episodic middle-man deals' be? Should I ask him? Yes, I will, but a little later.

They arrived in Venice late in the evening and stayed at the best hotel—which Schell would have done even if

he hadn't been expecting an advance from the colonel. He had the conviction that for a real man money always; sooner or later, turns up, and for someone like that it was not only improper to save it but you had to fling it away, showing in every way that you had just as much as you wanted.

In the morning Schell got in touch with his Swiss bank by telephone and found that two thousand dollars had been paid into his account; somehow he was not happy about it. It would have to be returned as soon as possible. I'll have to think up something very quickly. And the worst of it all is that Natasha thinks I'm a rich man! There would be nothing either odd or indelicate if after the wedding she were to ask me about my means. He himself was surprised at her not asking, and he had been thinking beforehand of something to say by way of reply.

The enchanted city stunned Natasha; she kept oh-ing and ah-ing the whole day along the Grand Canal. 'I could never even have imagined such a thing!' she said, without entirely understanding herself whether she was talking about Venice or her own happiness. They spent the whole day looking at the city. Natasha's enthusiasm made Schell happy. At dinner he told her about Venice and said that he knew 'all two hundred palazzi.' He could name about thirty or forty.

'This city was given absolutely nothing by nature. Everything has been created by human genius and labour. If I were capable of being proud of mankind this is just the place where I would be. . . . There was a time in my life when I used to come here every Easter. At that

time there were still very few steamboats and motorboats on the canals, the stillness was absolute, just the thousand-year-old cries of the gondoliers which you heard today. Nothing was better for quieting the nerves than that stillness.'

After dinner he advised her to go upstairs to the room and take a rest: 'With your poor health you have to lie down more.'

'But my health isn't in the least poor! But all right, sit by yourself in the lobby or take a walk, else you'll just get bored with me,' she said as though joking, and got up. Actually she felt a great fatigue.

He went out to the lobby, ordered a coffee, and started smoking. He was still thinking about the same thing, the same boring subject: money; he was ashamed of himself. Just that one worry—accursed money! Should I go back to Berlin next week? I'll tell the colonel I can't go to Moscow and ask him to give me another assignment. He'll tell me to go to hell. And for that matter that's not the way to behave. In any case, then I'd have to have the two thousand in my pocket to give back to him if he doesn't agree. Where will I get it from? Part of it will disappear right here. Let's suppose that when we leave I would be able to give him back only a thousand five hundred and tell him I'll give him the other five hundred very soon. But he visualized the expression on the colonel's face and felt he couldn't say that either. And what would there be to live on then? Sell the pictures and the furniture; when you're in a hurry you never get a thing. And then what? The cards would be left. . . .

In the lobby, accompanied by the manager, a short, dark-haired man of exotic aspect in a dinner jacket was coming down the staircase. He said something angrily to the manager in Spanish. The latter shook his head quickly, evidently not quite understanding, and replied in French. Really very deferential. . . . Who can it be? thought Schell. A pleasant and miserable face. There's something primitive about him, as though he were ready to snatch up a knife. Well dressed; hook-nosed; his moustaches are slightly lighter than his hair. Almost automatically Schell entered all this on some ribbon in his head. Puerto Rican, perhaps? . . .

'I don't know French. You should have people here who understand Spanish,' the man said angrily, and went into the bar.

'Who's that?' Schell asked a servant.

'A billionaire!' the flunkey answered in a mysterious whisper. 'A billionaire from the Philippine Islands! Just got here, took the best rooms.'

'What's his name?'

'No idea. He can't speak any language. Are you having cognac or benedictine?'

'Cognac.'

A few minutes later, Schell got up and went over to the manager.

'I'm giving you a cheque tomorrow on a Swiss bank. I have no account in Venice. You can arrange it. Around three thousand Swiss francs; that will be enough for me for the time being. . . . Who is that gentleman?' he asked casually. 'His face seems familiar; I think I've met him somewhere.'

'You may have seen his picture in the papers. He's fabulously rich,' said the manager with a smile, and pronounced a long triple-barrelled name. 'He wants to buy a palazzo here and arrange some sort of magnificent festival. A billionaire!'

'There are no more dollar billionaires around, and a billion lire is less than two million dollars,' said Schell carelessly. Land, I think! he said to himself. In sight of land! and he went to the bar. The Filipino was stretched out in an easy-chair, smoking. He looked glum. Schell sat down at a neighbouring table.

'What a splendid evening!' he said in Spanish. The man with the triple name cheered up a little.

'Are you Spanish?'

'Argentinian,' answered Schell, and introduced himself. The Filipino mentioned his own name.

'At least with you it's possible to speak Spanish. At this hotel no one else understands it!'

'I noticed that the manager didn't understand it very well. If I can be of any use to you, I'm at your service. Then you don't like the hotel?'

The Filipino sighed. 'Why shouldn't I like it? Probably it's very good. They say the building is historical. Doubtless the style is remarkable. I don't understand anything about styles, like everyone else, but they pretend they do and I don't. In Seville I have my own palace; everyone's mad about it but me. I dislike this European chasing after antiquities. You have to live in a modern way. I built myself a house in Manila with seventeen bedrooms, each one with a bath, not standing ones, either, but built right into the floor. And here I have a

suite with four rooms but with only one bath. . . . I can see you've already decided I'm a parvenu? As a matter of fact, I am, but an honest one. I'm rich and I'm aware of my duty to society. Here the rich Europeans do nothing but imitate dukes and aren't of the slightest use to society. . . . But Venice is a beautiful city. It's like absolutely nothing else. I like that. I'm planning to buy a palazzo on the Grand Canal.'

'A very fine investment,' said Schell. 'Real estate is going up everywhere.'

'I don't need any capital investments. I simply want to have a palace in Venice. I'll be coming here sometimes. Aside from that I want to arrange a gigantic intellectual festival here and invite the most important people in the world. A rich man ought to be aware of his duty to society!'

'Of course. An extremely interesting idea.'

'I've decided to call my festival the Festival of Beauty. Will that sound all right in other languages?'

'First rate.'

'In my opinion Venice is the right place for it. A palace is essential. But which one should I buy?'

Schell named several palaces at random. 'Of course I don't know which ones are for sale. How many people are going to be at the festival?'

'Three thousand.'

'The Vendramin Palazzo would be suitable,' Schell suggested.

'Do you know all the palaces here?'

'In Venice I know every stone, I know the history of the city, its past, everything. This is the hundredth time

I've been here. This time I've come to take a rest with my wife. I've just got married.'

'Really? I'm not married. Do you intend to stay here long?'

'I don't know yet. I've been liquidating my affairs. I'm trying to live as pleasantly as possible. If my wife likes it here, then we'll try a month or even longer.'

'That's very nice to hear. We might even . . . so you also know Venetian history?'

Schell started talking about the Venice of the eighteenth century, about the festivals of the doges. The Filipino listened to him with interest.

When Natasha came into the bar at ten o'clock they were playing cards.

'I've met an old acquaintance,' Schell told her cheerfully. 'Unfortunately he speaks only Spanish. I'll be the interpreter.' He introduced the rich man to Natasha.

'I'm very ashamed of myself, I've just won three thousand lire from your husband. If he'll pardon me, he plays badly. In addition I always win at everything. Even gambling.'

'My wife has grown accustomed to my constant losing.'

'I've been looking for you everywhere,' said Natasha. She was not very pleased about meeting someone new. Thank God, I don't speak Spanish, I don't have to make conversation, she thought. . . . She sat down for a moment and then excused herself, mentioning her fatigue. Schell kissed her hand affectionately but didn't express any desire to go upstairs with her.

'I'll be up very soon, my dear.'

He did not rejoin her for an hour and a half. She was waiting for him, concealing her distress. So that's how it is, he's bored with me already! I mustn't show him I'm angry. . . . It's all nonsense; it doesn't mean anything at all.

Schell was very cheerful. 'A very nice fellow, and amusing. I know him from Paris.'

'What's his name? Who is he?'

'You wouldn't remember it anyhow, he has a triple family name and five or six Christian names. I don't know them myself: José? Rodriguez? Ramir?'

'What should I call him? Don José? Or Senor Rodriguez?'

'I've just remembered: it's Don Ramón. But you can also call him Don José. I'll tell him that it's from one of Beethoven's operas, *Carmen*, adapted from a novel by Dostoevski. He himself says he's a parvenu, and I've never met any parvenus like that. What they usually do is brag, dress tastelessly, and are supposed to have fingers "bedecked with costly rings," but he dresses very well indeed. And his manners are not in the least like those of one of those old-fashioned, bloated, boasting, jumped-up tradesmen. It's true he boasts, but not much. In any case he's not a "boor," as a woman I know says. And it's amusing; he said himself that he doesn't understand anything about any art, nevertheless there's a strong aesthetic element in him. Strange, all the aesthetes I ever knew were physically ugly. He, on the contrary, is quite personable, not at all bad-looking. He talks nonsense with an unusually portentous look, but the strangest thing about him is his eyes: pensive, sad, even, if you like,

beautiful. And they still say that the eyes are the windows of the soul. He is, of course, a megalomaniac, not personally, so to speak, but by "class." He told me that only private wealth can save the world. Not private property, just all-powerful private wealth! Just imagine the intellectual scheme he's cooked up.'

He told her about the festival, and how he had promised to give helpful advice. Natasha listened with a disagreeable feeling.

'Then that means we'll be kept here?'

'Where are we in a hurry to? Let's hang around Venice for a while.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

A PALAZZO on the Grand Canal was bought very quickly. It had everything it should have: an *atrio*, *cortile*, mosaic floors, ceilings painted by celebrated masters, chimneys of Greek marble, faded gilt, bronze, old-fashioned divans, easy-chairs, and coffer. A great deal of it had to be mended, a great deal more bought. Ramón was satisfied with the palazzo, though he would have preferred to buy the Ca' d'Oro. 'I can't get you the Ca' d'Oro,' said Schell. 'Try for yourself.'

The interests of the sellers in no way differed from his own. However, he didn't forget himself; he protected his principal and bargained. He himself sometimes thought with a sneer of his own unusual code of honour. Ramón was almost thoroughly disinterested in prices, and if he sometimes requested and got reductions, then it was only, as he explained to Schell, in order not to be taken for a fool. Schell received no commission of any kind from him. And he had indeed agreed to deal with the purchases only at the insistent request of the Filipino.

Ramón obscurely guessed that Schell was getting a commission from the tradespeople. However, he had nothing against that: it was in the nature of things. He appreciated Schell's not accepting any remuneration from him; he felt a certain respect for people who rejected his money. I supposed he's guessed, Schell thought with a disagreeable feeling; well, so be it, I'm not obliged to work for him for nothing. They were both satisfied with

each other. Friendly relations were firmly established. By the second day the Filipino had asked to be called by his first name. Natasha found this very amusing.

'But good heavens, I'm incapable of calling a strange man by his first name.'

'What's the difference? You can't talk to each other anyway. He clings to me because I speak Spanish.'

'I understand that, but why do you cling to him?' she asked, and was disconcerted to see a grimace of irritation flit across his face. 'But I have absolutely nothing against him, I'm glad an acquaintance of yours has turned up.'

'It's true I like this Filipino. He has some very attractive traits.'

'What?'

'He's kind, likes to give people pleasure, and doesn't even require any gratitude for it.'

'Then I forgive him everything. The main thing in a person is kindness.'

'And he's not stupid. Or at least not invariably stupid. Sometimes it's interesting for me to talk to him. But he chatters too much.'

'Please stay with him more and don't think about me. I want to study Venice properly, while you know it and there's no point in your constantly accompanying me.'

'There's also no point in talking to him too much. In spite of everything he's a thoroughgoing ignoramus.'

This was acknowledged quite readily by Ramón himself when he talked to Schell. 'I'm an ignoramus, but no fool. I notice a great deal without seeming to.' (My commission, thought Schell, with a still more disagree-

able feeling.) 'And basically I'm better than a great many people. I'm aware of my duty to society. I feed a great many people. I'm supporting people who are of absolutely no use to me. I'm quite used to it and have been for a long time. My principal shortcoming is that I'm obstinate.'

'A great many people probably hate you because you've been so lucky.'

'I don't think so,' said Ramón, surprised and hurt. It was plain that this idea had never entered his head. He was naïvely vexed. 'I don't think I'm hated.'

'I wasn't expressing a very original thought. I, too, hated rich people before I became rich myself.' They were silent for a moment. 'Nevertheless, I would like to grasp the aim of your festival as well as possible. In my opinion . . .'

'You said you appreciated my idea!' said Ramón, annoyed. 'I don't like repeating the same thing. There's a struggle going on now between two worlds. My idea is that it is only private wealth that can show mankind the significance of Western civilization. You cannot defeat the Communists with force, and not with science either. They must be dealt a blow by means of beauty!' he enunciated, with three exclamation points in his intonation. 'I want my Festival of Beauty to surpass anything ever seen by the world! . . . I asked you to think of a theme and a programme, I hope you've done so?'

'Yes, I agreed to think about it. I've done some reading about it,' answered Schell. His tactic lay in keeping himself completely independent and occasionally underlining his independence. 'Though to defeat the world by

beauty is not so easy. But in any case with unlimited credit the sensation may be terrific, I suggest the following: we'll reproduce, with complete precision and dazzling brilliance, the ceremony of electing a doge. This will also be the apotheosis of the idea of *elections*. Thus, by way of beauty, you will counterpose to the Communists the democratic idea, too.'

'That might be a good idea. . . . Yes, yes, . . . a wonderful idea. . . . Does that mean we'll have to rent the Doges' Palace?'

'No, they won't let us have it. Nor is it at all essential. As a rule this is how the affair went off. Guns were fired throughout the city, bells rung, and the people went into a frenzy. To the sounds of music the new doge left his private palace. Yours, as you know, at one time belonged to the family of one of the doges. Then he went through St. Mark's Square. A historical umbrella was carried over his head, the *umbraculum Domini Ducis*. He was accompanied by patricians, senators, and all the estates, right down to the tailors and cobblers. In this way three ideas are realized: beauty, the electoral principle, and social equality. Now, it seems to me I understand you correctly as a man. You're fed up with everything, you're looking for, well, let's say new sensations, magnificence in beauty, isn't that it?'

'I don't deny it. Yes, new sensations. You're a clever fellow.'

'You will play the role of the doge.'

'I? The doge?'

'You even look the part. We'll simply paste a beard on.'

'What will my part consist of?'

'You'll sit on the throne in your palace. Bodyguards will be standing behind you. They used to wear velvet robes and jackets of various colours, short trousers, and long hose, also velvet. We'll order a sword for you with a hilt studded with precious stones. That will cost a lot, but after all you'll be able to keep the sword. After your picture with it is taken for the newspapers and magazines you can hang it up on the wall of your study.'

'But what will actually happen? I can't just sit on the throne.'

'Of course not. We'll be true to history again. The new doge's lady, the dogaressa, came to join him. She was brought there in a gigantic gondola with a pavilion. The luxury of this gondola ought to be indescribable. Again, I warn you, this will cost a lot.'

'You probably want your wife to play the dogaressa?' asked Ramón. 'Of course she's very beautiful, but . . .'

'I never even thought of such an idea!' said Schell, suddenly getting angry. 'Look for a dogaressa yourself.'

'I didn't mean to say anything offensive.'

'Nor would I permit you to say anything offensive. In fact, I'm ready to abandon the whole thing at any moment. I don't care a damn!'

'Please don't be angry, my dear friend. . . . And what happens with the dogaressa?'

'To the sound of an orchestra, accompanied by a resplendent entourage, she floats to your palace, goes up to you, and sits on the throne next to you. The populace goes into a frenzy. Then we'll set up a show in the grand ballroom as it was during the Renaissance. And in the

audience there will be all the celebrities of the world, nobility, writers, movie stars. . . . The festival will end with a magnificent historical banquet.'

Schell was growing more and more cheerful. He was no longer irritated by the sight of the fortune's favourites who crowded the luxury hotel. Now he himself was a success of equal status. Money was flowing into his pockets as never before; nor had he ever gotten it so easily, without the slightest danger, almost without effort. According to his rough estimate the festival might bring him in around twenty-five thousand dollars.

He had not yet returned the two thousand dollars he had received from the colonel, although now it would have been easy. He was trying to think up the best explanation. Of course he's going to decide I got cold feet. In spite of his decision to leave intelligence work for good it was unpleasant for him to have his former professional colleagues consider him a failure.

Once while riding in a gondola with Natasha he thought: but why don't I just tell the colonel the truth? I'll write that I fell in love unexpectedly, still more unexpectedly got married, that I can't leave my wife, am compelled to turn down the assignment, I earnestly beg his forgiveness, and am enclosing a cheque for the two thousand. The colonel would shrug his shoulders, curse up and down, and everything would be over with.

When he was alone he set about composing a letter to the colonel. No, it's impossible! It would be far easier to tell him face to face in Berlin. I'll say it with a little smile, making fun of myself, 'Just imagine, in my old age some-

thing like this had to happen: I've gotten married! . . . ' Instead of the letter he sent a telegram: 'arriving shortly.' That wasn't very suitable; he'll feel still more certain I've agreed. But no harm done.

The following day he said to Natasha, 'Well, have you decided where we should live? High time we made up our minds.'

He spoke as though he had already put this question to her many times and she still hadn't replied. Natasha was both embarrassed and overjoyed: a conversation at last, a real conversation! 'I? It's all the same to me. It all depends on you. I suppose you have business in Berlin?'

'I'm getting rid of my business. It was too boring. And I don't like Berlin. Well, choose.'

'But how can I? . . . Surely you can't live wherever you please?' she asked, frightened. But what if he thinks I'm interested in his money?

'We have enough for a simple life. And it's much the same to me where we live. I should very much like to have a little house of my own with a garden. What if we settled in Italy? We both like it so much here.'

'I should adore it!'

'You've never asked me about anything. I know you're tactful to the point of foolishness. And I didn't want to speak to you before, since until now my business had not been cleared up. Now I can tell you that I've sold it to Ramón. And that's why I want to show him my thanks by helping him with his idiotic festival.'

'So that's it! I admit I never realized. . . . Oh, I'm so happy!'

They bought a cozy one-storey house on the Lido. And that evening when they returned to the hotel the hall porter handed Schell a telegram. It was from the colonel. It said: 'Nikolai dead coming Venice soon await arrival.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN the morning Schell sat down in a corner of the terrace of the Café Florian. From long habit in cafés he always sat down near the wall or else facing a mirror—he had to see what took place behind him also. He drank coffee and lazily thought that things were not arranging themselves at all badly.

The colonel's telegram had startled him. The trip to Russia had fallen through, and not through his own fault in the least. What a stroke of luck, my not sending him that letter refusing! Now I would have the moral right not to return the advance. . . . Ever since becoming a man of property I've been using the words 'moral' and 'morality' more and more frequently. That's also one of the 'former' Schell's ideas, blast him! . . . Of course I'll give back the advance. He'll be stunned; in our milieu people seldom behave that way. That is, in my *former* milieu, which I'm definitely out of. . . . But what, actually, am I going to do from now on? . . . The orchestra on St. Mark's Square played something dashing. Tourists were fussing around with cameras. Suddenly Schell sat transfixed: not fifteen steps away from him Edda was feeding some pigeons.

He gazed at her as though he had seen a hippopotamus in the square. He was about to try to slip off unobserved, but just then their eyes met. Edda didn't look surprised, and came over to him with a smile that seemed to bode nothing specially bad. As usual she was dressed neither well nor badly, but somewhat improbably.

'How are you, my dear? Have you been back from Spain long?' she asked sarcastically, sitting down at his table. Natasha! he thought. He was supposed to meet her at the hotel, but she might come through the square, too.

'Hello, my little sweetie pie. How are you?' he said, kissing her hand. 'You're looking wonderful; I thought you were in Paris?'

'I was. You probably know I carried everything off brilliantly well.'

'I don't know a thing, but about that I never had the least doubt.'

'I've just arrived and found out to my joy that you were in Venice. I saw you from shore the riding in a gondola with a little biddy and a rather ugly little monsieur.'

'Yes, I have some acquaintances here.'

'Is she your mistress? I'll drown her in vitriol,' said Edda, though rather peaceably.

'She's not my mistress.'

'I know you! But first let's talk business.'

'Let's talk business, my own little cherry blossom.'

She told him how she had picked up the lieutenant—in the twinkling of an eye—seduced him, made him her accomplice, and got some extraordinarily valuable documents. She spoke in a half-whisper, though there was no one around them, and with a modestly triumphant look. Schell kept interpolating approving and even enthusiastic exclamations.

'... In the evenings we drank champagne, I read him my verses aloud, and he fell madly in love with me. He's a very sweet boy. You lied when you said I would

manage it as an enchantress; with him I worked it by playing the fool!

'I can imagine how worn out you are! But what you've accomplished is simply astounding,' he said, when she stopped to wait for further raptures. 'And where is this lieutenant now?'

'He's arriving tomorrow. For my sake he's broken with the Americans for good! But we couldn't leave together, that wouldn't have been conspiratorial. And just imagine, even before he met me he was Left-wing! Jim is against the partition of Russia.'

'Not really? Probably you fell in love with him, too?' asked Schell hopefully.

'No, he's not intelligent enough for me. And I don't like the name Jim! What could be more prosaic?'

'Did he pay you well?'

'Not a penny. It was all for love. I wouldn't even have taken any from him.'

'No matter, my angel, the Soviet colonel will give you a great deal of money. Strike while the iron is hot! Leave for Berlin quickly. In fact today!'

'But why so quickly? No, I'll hang about here with Jim and you,' she said mockingly. 'And your Soviet colonel is not only a boor but a miser as well.'

'Have you already given him the papers?'

'Of course. The same day Jim told me to,' replied Edda. This wasn't entirely accurate: Jim had told her the packet was to be handed over on the eighteenth, but she had a number of fittings at her dressmaker's that day and she handed the packet over the day before. 'And d'you know how much they paid me?' She mentioned an amount

that actually was not very large. 'Of course they explained that they had to determine the importance of the papers and for the time being were just giving me expense money. My expenses were enormous. I can't go around dressed like that biddy of yours! Is she your mistress already or just on the verge?'

'You're a fool, my little sweetie pie. Talk sense for a change. D'you need money?'

'I always need money! What d'you think? They gave me chicken feed and now you ask me!'

'I could supplement it for you, my angel. Not by very much, of course.'

'Is that so? Have you gotten rich?'

'I got hold of a thousand dollars. I can give you half.'

'Delightful. But what can I do with five hundred dollars? You don't call five hundred dollars money?'

'I'll send you more later on.'

'Later on? Send me? You mean you're not going back to Berlin for the time being?'

'I'm going back very soon. I know don't yet just when.' . . . Well, my love, are you satisfied with your new profession?'

'No. Completely dissatisfied!' said Edda, and suddenly, to Schell's astonishment, she burst into tears.

'But then, what do you want?' he asked in a different tone.

'I don't know myself what I want. One thing now, something else a moment later! I only know that I'm unhappy. And I can't stand your intelligence business any more!'

'But you can throw it over!'

'Then what will I live on?'

'We have to think. Where are you stopping?'

'She named a hotel, luckily not his own, but also a very good one.'

'Aha! Probably expensive. And I live at the same place as that ugly little monsieur, as you call him. He's there with a girl, the one you saw. Would you believe it, I found some work with him and he's paying all my expenses.'

Schell told her about the Festival of Beauty. Edda listened mistrustfully but attentively. She liked the name of the festival enormously.

'All that's very interesting if you're not lying. So that little biddy is his mistress? And does he pay well?'

'Tolerably,' replied Schell. An idea had flashed through his mind. I must palm her off on Ramón, but in such a way that she doesn't stay here long, doesn't meet Natasha, and sees her as little as possible. 'I suppose you speak Spanish?'

'So-so. Why do you ask?'

'He's a Filipino and can't speak anything but Spanish. Wait, I've got an ingenious idea. You must go to Berlin at once.'

'"At once" is out of the question. They already have the documents.'

'Aside from the documents you have to make a personal report. And right away at that. I know very well what I'm talking about.'

'He can wait a little while. And if he pays less than a thousand dollars I'll stop working for him!'

Schell's face took on a sepulchral expression. 'D'you

think it's that simple? You just tell him, "I don't want to work for you any more, good-bye," is that it? My dear, you don't leave *them* that way! They may let you go if the business is handled with sense. But to leave of your own accord! . . . I pity you. He's naturally going to think you've gone over to the Americans! I won't be surprised to hear you've been found at the bottom of the Grand Canal.'

'What is this, a joke?'

'I'm speaking absolutely seriously! I warned you that working for the colonel is dangerous. He's a terrifying man. . . . So the lieutenant is arriving tomorrow? You say he's broken with the Americans?'

'He's decided to break with them. Meanwhile, he's got a month's leave.'

Schell couldn't make out why the lieutenant was coming to Venice. Could he actually have fallen in love with her, or does that mean the Americans have decided to use her for another job? That really would be dangerous for her.

'You must leave the colonel, but you must do it without fail on good terms.'

'How can I do that? And what should I do in general?'

'I want to get you a role in this festival—a very good role. You'll look more stunning than ever. We'll get you a dress and after the show you'll be able to keep it. A very expensive dress!'

'Now that sounds interesting!'

'The dress must be ordered in Berlin. It's impossible for you to return to Paris, and you won't get one here in Venice. The Filipino will pay *you* well, not what he pays me.'

'That's very important!'

'But for that it's absolutely essential to liquidate your relations with the colonel, if you've already decided to do so. There will be thousands of people at the festival, including, of course, Soviet agents. I don't want you to be stabbed to death in general, and not in the palace of my boss in particular. You have to leave for Berlin at once. I'll explain to you how the colonel must be talked to. Try to make him despise you.'

'Thank you.'

'You might tell him, for instance, that the American has fallen out of love with you.'

'I would never tell him such a nonsensical thing! And he would never believe it.'

'It's going to be rather complicated,' said Schell, without listening. 'No, for the time being you explain to him that your lieutenant has gotten leave for a month. If he's surprised at their having given him such a long leave tell him he hasn't had one for two years. If he wants the lieutenant to return earlier, say that that might arouse the suspicions of his superiors: people don't cut short their leaves willingly. Then the colonel will give you a leave, too. The lieutenant will have to be ordered under no circumstances (God forbid!) to break off relations with his superiors. After that either your passionate love for him will end—or his love for you,' interpolated Schell, 'or else they will transfer him somewhere else. In either case the colonel will despise you. Now the point is for you to leave him on good terms. After that come back here for the festival itself, in order not to start any rumours. Your American can either hang around here or travel

wherever he pleases. And my boss will give you money.'

'Will he give me a lot? If he's so rich, why is that hussy dressed like a government instructor in Estonia?'

'I have no idea,' answered Schell, with annoyance. As a matter of fact, it's time for Natasha to be dressed properly, he thought. 'Now leave this business of yours to me. I'll get you a good role. And the salary won't be less than two thousand dollars!'

'With an advance?' asked Edda, on whom this figure had produced a powerful impression.

'I'll also arrange for an advance, but on the fixed condition that you get a leave from the colonel. I strongly urge you to leave for Berlin at once. The talk with the colonel will take time, and it's not so simple to get an audience with him.'

'What are you in such a hurry about? I can't leave at once. Jim's only arriving tomorrow. And we have to rest a little in Venice from everything that's happened.'

'But then you won't have time for to have a dress made for yourself in Berlin.'

'But how can I have a dress made before knowing what my role is going to be? And where is the money I'm going to have it made on?'

'I'll send you a design. We'll transfer the money to Berlin as soon as you know exactly how much everything's going to cost. You're going to be a Venetian lady of rank, we won't pinch money on the dress.'

'All this has to be thought over. Let's have dinner tomorrow together with Jim. I'll introduce you and we can all talk it over.'

'Are you out of your mind? I'm even afraid of our being seen here together,' said Schell. 'We can't possibly meet any more, to say nothing of Jim. That would be very dangerous for both you and for me.'

'Why dangerous? Jim is now one of *our* people, all three of us working for the same cause. So how can we compromise you or you us?'

'You're evidently forgetting that the Americans also have an intelligence service which isn't at all bad. They have agents everywhere. It's highly likely that they're having you followed here.' Edda turned pale. 'It's no joke, an American officer in charge of the Rocquencourt furnace! You must get out of here at once and remove your traces as far as possible. And I have absolutely no desire for them to arrange to have me followed, too. No, we can't meet here any more, that's out of the question. Except that I'd like to show you to my boss. Without Jim.'

'Then let's have dinner, all three of us, this evening.'

'With you I have to spell everything out: I repeat, I *cannot* show myself with you. But here's what. Tomorrow at eleven in the morning I'm coming here to Florian's with my boss,' Schell improvised; Natasha was supposed to go to the Lido. 'You walk slowly past us. I'll show you to him and say you're a famous actress. Naturally, I won't nod to you and you won't look as though you know me: we're not acquainted with each other, it's simply that I've seen you a great many times on the stage. Walk to the end of the square and then if you like come back the same way. Dress challengingly, it'll make an impression on him. I'm depending on you, I know what taste you

have. Then I'll start telling him all sorts of things about you.'

'Very well, I agree. In spite of everything you are a friend,' said Edda. He looked at her and thought that she, too, even Edda, had some good qualities. And she's so stupid she has a right to all the extenuating circumstances available.

'But don't forget for a second that we don't know each other. And mind you don't smile at me. You can even encompass us with a disdainful look; that's your crowning number.'

'I'll encompass you with a disdainful look,' said Edda, ready for anything.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A DAY later Colonel Number One arrived in Venice.

This trip was on business too, but he was also entitled to a leave. A number of people who were familiar with his latest enterprise were enthusiastic and had no doubt that in Moscow the documents were considered authentic. An old general clapped him on the shoulder and called him the 'Shakespeare of Misinformation.' The colonel modestly deprecated his achievement; nevertheless, he felt very sure that he had never done anything better than this in his work and never would. Now he could retire with honour.

En route he thought about Schell again, this time quite benevolently: Schell had done him an enormous service.

The colonel knew that Edda was in Venice, too. He didn't want to meet her; he considered it inadmissible for him to meet Jim's mistress. But he would have liked to see Edda; he believed in his impressions of people, though he knew he had made mistakes more than once.

But it was necessary to have another very serious talk with Jim. He had coped brilliantly with the assignment, but he had written a rather strange letter, discontented, almost acid. It seemed Jim no longer wanted to remain in the army. Then I won't hold him back. What can I do with him? He won't find anything by himself; he's too proud, too light-minded. It's clear that he's getting to be more and more a member of the *intelligentzia*. Anything can be expected of him. And why did he go to Venice

with this little charmer? Is it possible she wants to stay and work for me?

For the time being Jim couldn't be officially rewarded, although his work had been appreciated. The colonel decided to give him a present. He regarded all presents to his nephew as tax-exempt advances against his inheritance. His nephew was to visit him in the evening, but he had scarcely any doubt he would see him that same day: in Venice you couldn't help running into people.

The colonel sat on the terrace at Florian's and ordered something with a melodious name. Florian's was wonderful, but he had a dual sensation, on one hand that he could go on sitting there endlessly, but on the other that there was a special vigour and joy of life brought about by the miracle of Venice—you had to do something; even in your seventh decade life was not over with. The compromise was that after sitting there for half an hour he decided to telephone Schell. He got up and crossed the square. I knew it, thought the colonel, there he is!

He had seen his nephew a few steps away. A happy smile flashed through the eyes of both of them, but neither one gave a sign that they knew each other. Jim was sitting on the terrace of the café with Edda. The colonel looked at her with the glance of a retired connoisseur. Very beautiful. I hope my playboy doesn't involve himself seriously. He scrutinized her from head to foot in an unobtrusively thoroughgoing way and walked on at his vigorous military pace.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THAT morning Edda was shown to Ramón. In the most unlikely costume she walked past Florian's very well, tossed them a haughty glance. Schell nudged the billionaire.

'Don't you know her?' he asked, when Edda had walked off. 'That's the famous actress; you've probably seen her on the screen.'

'I never have. Who is she?' asked Ramón, very much interested in such a beauty. Schell told him Edda's real name; there was no risk. Ramón didn't know anyone or anything. 'Have you invited her to my festival?'

'Not yet, but I can. A very good idea,' said Schell. I believe he's taken the bait, he thought with satisfaction.

'Get hold of her today,' said Ramón, but corrected himself, knowing that Schell disliked peremptoriness. 'Please ask my secretary to find her.'

During the day Schell reported to Ramón that he hadn't succeeded in finding Edda, but had learned her Berlin address and would send the invitation there.

'What do you mean, you haven't succeeded!' asked Ramón indignantly. 'I want to see her!'

'You can't have every wish,' answered Schell with an offended look. 'She was probably here just for a few hours en route. But if you want to get acquainted with her so much she can be offered a part in the show. . . . Listen,' he said, striking his forehead (it came out quite well), 'what if you offered her the role of the dogaresa! There's something Venetian about her looks.'

'That's just what I had in mind.'

'It'll cost quite a lot. I don't think she'd do it for less than three thousand dollars.'

'Offer her five thousand; just make sure she's here!'

This time Schell didn't think it necessary to be offended. The sum was a pleasant surprise. He didn't even consider taking a commission on it. But with pay like that it would be easy to free himself of Edda for ever.

'It will be done,' he said conciliatingly.

Schell was at home; he invited the colonel to meet him at Quadri's at half-past six.

'I wanted to discuss our future work together,' the colonel said. 'First of all, let me thank you sincerely for that woman.'

'Did she prove useful?'

'More or less.'

'Her career is settled,' Schell said cheerfully, and told him about the Festival of Beauty. 'If you were going to spend some time here I would send you an invitation. I'm representing one of the doge's bodyguards.'

'One of the doge's bodyguards,' repeated the colonel with growing surprise. 'Excuse me, but are you sure you're all right?'

'Quite sure. A masquerade is a very agreeable diversion. You would also see Edda there.'

'She's of no use to me any more. But I'm soon going to have something for you to do.'

'Thank you, but I can hardly be of any use to you, either,' said Schell, and took out a cheque-book, savouring the effect in advance. 'Since our affair never came to

anything, allow me to return your two thousand dollars. I received them in Swiss francs and so I'm returning them to you in Swiss francs: eight thousand five hundred and forty francs, isn't it?" he asked carelessly.

'Please, there's no hurry about it. You're not in the least to blame for the thing's falling through because of Maikov's death.'

'Nor are you.'

'But I'm not refusing to do any work with you in future. Is it that *you* are refusing to? Or are you dissatisfied with us?'

'Not in the least. It's simply that I'm not in the habit of accepting money for nothing. I told you, if you recall, that I might be leaving intelligence work. At that time I didn't tell you everything. You see, I've got married,' said Schell, although he had almost decided not to say this.

'Married?'

'Yes, I got married.'

The colonel suddenly burst out laughing. 'I congratulate you! I sincerely congratulate you. I wish you luck.'

'Thank you. And what were you laughing about, if I may ask?'

'You must excuse me. . . . You see, I still haven't been able to grasp the sort of man you are. . . . After all, you also play the 'cello! . . . Now it's more understandable. Perhaps you went into intelligence in order to have an extraordinary life, and now your life is becoming ordinary? If you've "repented," then perhaps the principle of the 'cello has, so to speak, repented in you.'

'It's very possible,' replied Schell coldly.

'Permit me to drink to your good fortune with this greenish-yellowish wine, for some reason called white.'

They drank another glass apiece. Schell looked at his watch.

'Are you in a hurry?'

'I haven't much time. . . . You evidently used to consider me an adventurer by nature?'

'Not in a bad sense. But after all, you really have had more than a few adventures. If you will allow me to speak frankly, I thought that the only things in life that interested you were adventure, women and money.'

'But that's a great deal, after all. Nevertheless, it's possible to go through a large number of adventures without being an adventurer. People are seldom adventurers by nature, they are made so by circumstances. In the Soviet Union, for instance, only officials can be adventurers. . . . In former times I would have chosen a military career.'

'But weren't you a pilot during the Spanish Civil War? I think on the side of the Loyalists.'

'Quite so. They paid huge salaries to foreign pilots.'

'Why wouldn't it have been better for you to serve in the Russian Army? But I've forgotten you're not Russian but Argentinian.'

'I am not Russian either by passport or by blood. But I had very serious reasons for not working for the Soviet government. Aside from that, when I was young the Soviet Army was still very weak and I don't like the weak. . . . In the old days there was still one career for people who liked adventure, a swift career that demanded no merits or gifts from a man—revolution. But in our days

that's been monopolized by the Communists and I hate them. Now there's nothing for me to do.'

'But you *have* an interesting profession.'

'You consider it interesting? Well, it's true that you are, so to speak, a poet in it.'

'Well, I hope that in any case you're not going back to work for our opponents?'

'You can be absolutely assured of that. I'll not go over to the Bolshevik faith. If there is anything genuine in me, it's my hatred for that. . . . I still don't know what I shall do.'

'So you're retiring? Actually, marriage is no reason for retirement.'

'I've married a girl who has no relatives, and I can't leave her for long periods. Of course you imagine she's rich. She hasn't a penny.'

'But if you're not rich, all the more reason why you shouldn't leave the service and return me an advance. I thought you were fond of our trade, in spite of everything.'

'I can't bear it.'

'You told me that. But everybody speaks that way. Ask any famous writer, journalist, or political figure. They'll tell you that they curse the day and the hour they chose their occupation.'

'Not all of them. . . . You've served your country, but I've served those who paid the most.'

'You say things like that too often for them to be altogether true. . . . I've known disinterested people even in intelligence.'

'You must have been lucky. I've never known people

like that in any profession. In any case I myself am far from disinterested.'

'You're not a man I can understand very well,' the colonel said.

'There's nothing hard to understand about me. I'm a man of no birth or family, an eternal and ubiquitous *sale étranger*. And a supreme egotist on top of that, "surrounded by myself on all sides," as Turgenev said. Or, more exactly, I *was* that. And after all the choice is limited for almost all of us. When a man is young, his life is most often poisoned by poverty. When he's old, there's no more pleasure left even in money. And my tastes have changed. As a child I dreamed of becoming a salesman in a sweetshop, then I wanted to be a chauffeur, and still later a soldier. Now I dream of a quiet, tranquil life.'

'But what are you thinking of taking up?'

'Idleness. It's the best occupation.'

'Not a bad one,' said the colonel uncertainly. 'Where are you thinking of going now with your wife?'

'We're going to settle somewhere in Italy,' answered Schell. He didn't feel like saying anything about buying the villa.

'On the sea near here there are wonderful little corners, and not expensive.'

'Perhaps here at that. Although I don't like the sea. I'll read books, memoirs, biographies, that's my favourite reading. I still have a little curiosity left, in spite of everything. When I was a boy I very nearly wept that I hadn't seen and never would see Napoleon,' he said laughing. 'So take the money.'

'Thank you,' said the colonel, glancing fleetingly at

the cheque. I just hope it won't bounce, he thought. 'I'm very sorry indeed. Let me add that in similar circumstances not everyone would return an advance. I appreciate it very much.'

They fell silent, looking at each other curiously. The colonel's glance once again paused at Schell's hands: they *are* a killer's hands, he thought. Probably I'll never see him again in my life, Schell thought, with unexpected regret. He looked at his watch again.

'I'm afraid I must leave you now; my wife is waiting for me.'

'Then I won't keep you. Once again I congratulate you. . . . But if you change your mind, we shall always be at your service,' said the colonel, shaking him firmly by the hand, this time without any squeamishness. One of the most interesting specimens in my collection. A 'cello player! he thought. I remember Jim's quoting someone who said about someone, 'He was an original, even though he tried to be one.'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

'WAIT a bit, I'll treat you to some champagne,' said the colonel. If even champagne doesn't calm Jim down it's obvious that things are really in a bad way, he thought. His Dostoevski mood, absolutely catastrophic. Jim went on with his monologue.

' . . . Fundamentally, your work isn't even of much use. What can your agents on the other side of the Iron Curtain tell you? Their reports are either true and have no significance, or else they are significant but false. . . . '

'Don't talk about something you don't understand,' the colonel interrupted him angrily. 'The most important thing now is to understand, to understand with certainty, what is going on over there. And that's why the activity I'm engaged in, though it sounds immodest, is the most useful in the world now.'

'You've succeeded in one project, you've sent a piece of important misinformation where it was necessary, and you're happy. But ten other projects don't succeed, and the money of us taxpayers is simply thrown out for nothing. And even those things that come off are made up for immediately by *their* projects, so that almost everything cancels out. That's the least of it; they will always have the bulge on you since they stop at nothing, while you have moral limits you don't overstep. And for that matter is the "truth" which your agents are supposed to be getting for you necessary? Secrecy would amount

to a certain, of course very flimsy, guarantee against war. Fear of the unknown would be the restraining factor.'

'Criminals also carry on a struggle against the police and also in contrast to them, stop at nothing; nevertheless, the work of the police is very useful and generally successful. With the help of their agents the Bolsheviks got hold of some reports that were of great value to them about our atomic arms. We would be absolute fools if we didn't do the same thing they're doing. That would simply be a crime against the country. Just suggest to the Kremlin that it cut down on its espionage.'

'I know that that's a powerful, in fact irrefutable, conclusion,' said Jim sadly. 'Suggesting anything the least bit decent to the Bolsheviks would be useless if only because they would make promises and not keep them anyhow. But you, too, can scarcely sincerely desire an agreement here; if they were to arrive at an agreement you would have absolutely nothing to do and your entire life's work would prove to have been a mistake.'

'Please don't get upset about that.'

'The usefulness of your work is very small and the harm it does is great. If a third war were to begin some time it would most likely spring out of some incident or other contrived by the intelligence. The fate of the world is dependent on some five or six colonels in the world! As far as I'm concerned espionage is now the symbol of evil in the world, and it crystallizes this whole god-damned cold war!' said Jim, and calmed down. He had unburdened his heart.

'Thank you. I've been occupied with this business all

my life, which is what, by the way, has enabled me to give you an education.'

'I'm not forgetting that, Uncle,' answered Jim, embarrassed. 'But—please don't get angry with me—for the first time in your life you gave me some bad advice. I did something vile.'

'Simply say that you've fallen in love with that scatter-brain!'

'And you still think you can see through people! Not only did I not fall in love with her, I find her repellent. I understood that in the real sense when I came here from Paris, I understood both her and myself. And then I found myself repellent.'

'But what have you done? What misfortune has there been? She just took to her heels and she's no longer in any danger. Judging by what you told me about her, she's a depraved tart. They were trying to do us great harm. We broke it up, thank God, and turned their own weapon against them; we did some damage, I hope more than a little. You played your role excellently. What is wrong? What do you expect of me?'

'If you had a personal enemy, would you give me an assignment to get acquainted with some ~~woman~~ of his in order to do him harm?'

'There's not the slightest similarity. States are constantly doing what individuals don't have the right to. It's always been that way and always will. . . . I can tell you that in my youth, when I began my career, I had doubts, too, though they were much weaker. I swiftly overcame them in myself. You don't want to overcome them—that's your affair. I didn't think you were so

sentimental. Well, I see you're not suitable for my department. Consequently . . .'

'Whether I'm suitable or not, I don't want to work in it. I repeat, your department is becoming an enormous social problem, or rather, more exactly, an enormous political danger! But I know very well I can't suggest any way out. For an individual perhaps there may be, but it's also a bad one: it consists in avoiding everything evil that's going on in the world.'

'A fine way out for a government! And that's enough of all this!'

'You did with me as you pleased, now you say "enough of all this." I've lost my self-respect. I told myself that if they arrested her I would commit suicide,' said Jim, although actually this had just come into his head.

'But you've gone completely out of your mind! No one's holding you back by force. *Bon voyage* and be happy. You can go back to your former job any day you like.'

'But I'm not going back there.'

'Do whatever you like. It would be best if you went back to the regular army. I won't put any obstacles in the way, I'll even help you. . . . What is the problem now? How to separate from her? I know she's leaving for Berlin tomorrow.'

'How do you know that?'

'As you see, the intelligence knows something, after all.'

'You've spoken with her, Uncle!'

'No. But of course I'm having her followed,' the colonel added, satisfied with the impression he was making on his nephew.

'By the way, you might congratulate me: I didn't

indicate by even so much as a look that I knew you at the café, did I? Did you like Edda?’

‘I went into a frenzy when I first clapped eyes on her. And of course I adore your travelling about with her.’

‘In the first place, don’t forget that I took up with her on your instructions, and secondly, you can’t deny she’s beautiful,’ said Jim. . . . ‘So you already know about this idiotic festival?’

‘As you see, I do.’

‘A fine spectacle the West is confronting the Communists with!’

‘Don’t tell me you’re becoming a fellow-traveller!’

‘You know perfectly well I detest the Communists, the fellow-travellers even more so. That’s just why I’m infuriated. It’s just such festivals and just such characters as that Filipino that are made to order for Bolshevik propaganda!’

‘There I agree with you. It’s amusing that he’s arranging this as propaganda against the Bolsheviks! The humour is heightened by the fact that the chief part in the show is going to be played by a Soviet agent. . . . Well, she’s leaving for Berlin. I don’t advise you to go with her, very much the contrary. Actually, she probably won’t even ask you to. In addition you say you find her repellent. So much the better. Is the question simply one of money? To purge your conscience, please give her some.’

‘I have none.’

‘You should have said so! Well, here, I want to make you a present of a thousand dollars. You’ve been longing for a good car. According to your rank and age a Ford or a Chevrolet is entirely adequate for you, but I think

that with a thousand dollars in cash you might be able to get a Packard, too, by paying something down, if your impudence is sufficient. The rest, of course, you can pay off from your own salary. . . . But I don't even have anything against your giving part of the money to your charming mistress. You can even give it all to her, if you're a complete jackass.'

'I'm terribly grateful to you,' said Jim, embarrassed. 'A present, and such a big one! For what?'

'For no reason. You don't deserve it. . . . Probably even without this you've spent a great deal on her?'

'Yes, of course, but . . .'

'In my opinion you don't have to give her any more. She's going to get a good deal of money from the Filipino.'

'Do you know that, too?'

'I know all.'

'Then you're an astounding exception in the profession! So you think I needn't give her any more?'

'I'm not going to decide that complicated conflict in your complicated soul—Edda or a Packard.'

'You're a cruel man, Uncle. You know I yearn for a Packard.'

'Struggle against this temptation. Make this sweet, good-hearted, lovely woman happy.'

'I'm going to give her a present anyhow.'

'How much, if I may make so bold as to ask?'

'What d'you think? Five hundred?'

'No, that's too little,' said the colonel, enjoying himself. 'Five hundred is too little for such a lovely woman.' He laughed. 'Here's what we'll do. I'll give you eight hundred dollars after she leaves. But take two hundred now and

do what you like with it. and stop sulking. You had more than a good time with her, she really is very pretty. Is she a terrific idiot or only medium?’

‘Extraordinary! Disarming!’ said Jim, reviving. His uncle was always able to calm him.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

NATASHA was annoyed that Schell still spent so much time with the Filipino. There was, to be sure, an explanation, but it was one that didn't satisfy her particularly. All right, so he bought something from him, did him a favour or two; well, let him just thank him with a little advice and work with him two or three days. But isn't it altogether too much this way? Once she even mentioned this to him cautiously (she kept daring more and more every day, to her own joy).

'But it's extremely entertaining, this Festival of Beauty of his. . . . By the way, Ramón asked me today whether you wouldn't like a part in the procession?'

'Me! In the procession?' cried out Natasha, with such horror that Schell burst out laughing.

Actually the Filipino had asked him again whether Natasha didn't wish to participate in the festival, and even added, 'Her conditions are mine.' All Schell could think of was Natasha and Edda appearing in the same procession.

Natasha went to the Lido almost every day and somehow made herself understood to the painters working on their house. They liked her very much; all ordinary people liked Natasha and felt that she was almost as 'simple' as they. The work was going well and rapidly. The walls in two rooms had already been painted and it would have been possible to arrange the furniture. One of these rooms was supposed to be Natasha's bedroom. Schell called the other the boudoir. She decided to turn

it into a nursery. She passionately wanted to have a son and a daughter.

Schell reluctantly consented to have her buy the furniture. He bought a book in German about the various periods. Natasha read everything attentively, learned their distinguishing points, and bought a bed, two plush easy-chairs, two similar ordinary chairs, a large mirrored cupboard, curtains, carpets, lamps, a night table—she had no idea what the period was but it was all very cheap. The furniture was brought in the morning; the painters arranged it, though this wasn't part of their work; she gave them a bottle of wine, for which they thanked her and asked her to drink with them.

During the day, at her request, Schell came over. He said nothing about what she had bought. Natasha saw that he was not very pleased: he's angry at my spending so little of his money!

'For the time being don't buy any more. We can bring down my own furniture quickly enough. Immediately after the festival we'll go to Berlin and get it. I'll buy the chandeliers myself. That metal pole with the little lamp wasn't even worth hanging from the ceiling,' said Schell, and seeing that she was hurt, he added, 'But buy the linen, and for heaven's sake don't skimp on money. These things are to last a lifetime.' The villa looks petty bourgeois already, he thought with irritation.

'But what's wrong with the lamp! Very well, you buy it, although it'll cost you twice as much. Can the books be brought down here now?'

'Why not? But of course don't carry them yourself, have the hotel send them by boat.'

They had accumulated a few dozen books. Schell bought some practically every day. Natasha was astonished at how quickly he read. There were a good many expensive editions of the history of Venice, which had been bought at Ramón's expense.

Natasha put the books temporarily in the linen cupboard. She painstakingly wiped off every book with a cloth. A sheet of paper fell out of a heavy lexicon. It had some figures in Schell's handwriting: '320.28. .56.25'. For some reason the slip gave her an unpleasant sensation. Money? Bills? They seem to be uneven figures, she thought uneasily.

In the evening, when they got back to the hotel, she handed Schell the slip of paper. He glanced at it and, to her surprise, blushed, something which he never did. I forgot to destroy it! I've lapsed right back into childhood, he thought. I left the profession just in time!

'It fell out of the dictionary. Did you need it? Probably something about some—*stocks*?' she pronounced the unfamiliar word carefully.

'Yes, I suppose so. I jotted down the quotations from the newspapers.' And did I have to say, 'I suppose so?'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EDDA was nearly always discontented with everything—both by character and by her own principle: anyone who was satisfied with everything was given nothing. But on the way from Venice to Berlin she emerged from her usual state. Like Schell, she had never been so well taken care of.

In spite of the danger that—in his words—was threatening them, Schell took her to the station. She had a single first-class compartment. He was sitting there with her, repeating his instructions and interrogating her like a schoolteacher; that was why he had come to the station: Edda never understood anything the first time. Finally, not long before the train left (she was already getting alarmed), he gave her a cheque on a bank in Berlin.

‘Three thousand dollars,’ said Schell, having prepared an effect here, too.

‘Three!’

‘Three. You’re going to be the dogaressa.’

‘Dogaressa!?’

‘Yes. The doge’s lady. Ramón is the doge. I hope you understand to whom you’re indebted until the end of your life for this unheard-of success? The greatest actresses in the world have been fighting for this part. You might say they were grovelling at his feet. I told him that you are a movie star, the new Greta Garbo! And I talked him into giving you five thousand dollars! To you! And for what?’

‘Nevertheless, Greta Garbo wouldn’t have become a dogaressa for only five thousand dollars.’

'Fool. Who d'you think you are? I won't say what you are. As it is you're being given an advance of two thousand five hundred. And here in this envelope is a colour sketch of the costume of the dogaressa. I'll arrange for you to have unlimited credit for it.'

'What does unlimited credit mean? I adore precision.'

'That means, my beloved, that you may buy the most expensive materials, silk, velvet, and brocade, without being bothered by prices. Keep an account, which, of course, you'll pad. I have nothing against that, but don't lose your head, you have to have a conscience: not more than ten per cent.'

Edda took the drawing out of the envelope. 'Oh, what bliss! I'll be stanning!'

'You're stunning in any costume. Even in Eve's. Now listen, my little blossom, you must come back two days before the show, neither earlier nor later.'

'Why such precision? I'll come back whenever I feel like it!' said Edda, who felt far more reassured now that she had the cheque.

Schell took her by the hand, squeezed it so that she cried out with pain, and took the cheque away. 'You'll come back two days before, d'you hear? By the way, remember, this is an advance. If you're late or arrive earlier, then I give you my word, you won't get a single penny more! Now here's the cheque, take it, and don't forget.'

'Oh, very well, I'll come back two days before.'

'In the drawing there are a great many jewels. Of course they're fakes. We'll give you the crown here. But you'll be able to buy real lace.'

From the platform he waved to her, turned away, and went out while she was still blowing him kisses. Edda was pleased with him. She also appreciated his not having deducted his own five hundred dollars from the advance.

She walked through the corridor of the railway-car, didn't notice anyone suspicious, and felt reassured. She returned to her compartment, took the cheque out of her handbag, and read it all, from the figure to the signature. It's all right! Thank God! Both the money and then such a part! She was delighted with the word 'dogressa.' In her tiny mirror Edda put on a look like a dogressa. I'll do it! I'll be a celebrity! There's no doubt he's much better than that youngster Jim. She divided men up very clearly into categories; but she loved all the categories . . . Jim had been told he oughtn't to go to the station for reasons of conspiracy. He had nothing at all against this.

There was, however, one fly in the ointment: the passage across the Iron Curtain, the conversation with the Soviet colonel.

Edda went to see him three days later in a state of painful excitement—going over the border she had the feeling that some curtain was actually going to manifest itself then and there.

Her reception was cordial.

The papers got by Edda had turned out to be extremely important. The colonel had sent them off to Moscow at once and, after a preliminary examination, his superiors had expressed their gratitude to him. As usual, they expressed it not too warmly, saying that the papers would be carefully studied, but he saw that they were enraptured

by the treasure that had fallen into their laps. Now he could count on some reward, even a promotion. The very idea of pilfering papers from the Rocquencourt furnace could not help but make an impression by virtue of its showiness.

The colonel interrogated Edda in detail.

' . . . You have executed the assignment rapidly. Let me thank you,' he said. He seldom said this to agents; in his mouth it sounded effusive.

'I had to do a great deal of work,' said Edda, managing to calm down a little. Just as at their first meeting there was something about the colonel's looks that frightened her. 'I'm simply worn out! You cannot imagine, Comrade Colonel, how this work exhausts me!'

'Really!' said the colonel. 'Perhaps you can rest now. That American obtained leave for a whole month?'

'Yes. For two years he hasn't had one.'

'But mightn't he go back to his old post immediately?'

'I'm afraid that would attract the attention of his superiors, Comrade Colonel. People seldom turn down leave,' said Edda. Schell knows everything! she thought.

'Yes, that may be so. Then it's not necessary. Of course you must maintain—a close contact with him. The closest of contacts. That's not hard for you, you have a great deal of sex appeal,' he said with a sneer. 'And for us that's very important with respect to future conjunctures. Is his position there sound?'

'I don't know,' said Edda. Schell had not foreseen this question. 'For some time now he's been expecting a promotion,' she added, hoping to gladden the colonel.

'For the time being I'm not going to give you any

further directives. Throughout the present conjuncture you'll carry on with him. Instructions remain as before. Watch him like a bloodhound and behave yourself properly. Are you still writing verses?' .

'You know that, too!' said Edda, shyly casting down her eyes.

'I do.'

'Do you like poetry, Comrade Colonel?'

'Nothing of the sort,' he said, shrugging his left shoulder. 'And how is that what's-his-name of yours? Schell? He hasn't deigned to see me any more. . . . But to hell with him!'

'I'll make a thoroughgoing report, Comrade Colonel,' said Edda, attempting to speak in a peculiar way; she said Comrade Colonel with a purely martial intonation.

The colonel gave Edda a thousand marks altogether saying the final remuneration would be decided on afterwards. The skinflint might even pay more, she thought; the sum no longer meant so much to her, however, and she decided not to haggle. The main thing is for me to have some peace of mind now.

'And there's something else,' said the colonel impressively. 'I know that lieutenant may have given you a lot of money; that doesn't concern me. But—don't think of retiring! Our people never—retire. I'll tell you myself as soon as you stop being of any use to me. Until then you're obliged to work. You have the lexicon; if anything happens write it to me in code.'

He pretended to be raising himself a little in his chair. . . .

Edda ordered a dress. She had been about to go to Brussels and pick out some lace there. It could also be bought in Berlin, but she had long since tired of Berlin. But as it came out she didn't go to Brussels. A letter arrived from Schell—brief and with no code. 'I want to tell you something,' he wrote. 'Brush up your Spanish. I know your ability at languages. You'll easily find some girl in Berlin to make you perfect. All it needs is some practice. Your good fortune depends on it. A word to the wise!'

She immediately hired not a girl but a man teacher—she was very bored without men. The teacher, who was, however, aged and uninteresting, came every day for two hours. Now it was impossible to leave. The lace was also bought in Berlin. The grand total, plus expenses, came to one thousand six hundred and twenty-seven dollars: precise, not round figures always made the best impression.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EDDA returned to Venice two days before the festival. Schell met her at the station and respectfully kissed her hand. A camera clicked, a photographer was waiting on the platform. There was also one dejected reporter. Edda gave an interview. Schell had been awaiting it apprehensively, but it went off very well.

'A downright Sarah Bernhardt,' Schell praised her when they were alone. 'A suite with two rooms has been reserved for you.' He named one of the best hotels. 'At our expense.'

'I should think it would be! But why not at your hotel?'

'What's the point in meeting his mistress? Your old hotel isn't bad either, but after all your American is still there, isn't he?'

'Yes, and I have to keep contact with him; the colonel insists on it.'

'Keep contact with him,' he said, just as the colonel did. 'You can also dine with him today. Preferably in his suite. And how is our dear colonel, rot and blast him? Has he lost his mind definitely yet?'

'Why should he have lost his mind?'

'Well, he does have abnormal eyes, surely you noticed it?'

'But what sort of man is he really?'

'He's a mixture. Five per cent. Lenin, ten Suvorov, twenty the Gogol madman, while the rest is vodka.'

That evening Schell introduced Edda to Ramón. Her success exceeded his expectations. What especially enraptured the Filipino was that Edda spoke Spanish. Schell approvingly nodded his head. But he looked outstandingly reserved, almost neutral, like an observer at a diplomatic conference who represents a friendly but uninvolved power. Ramón wanted to see Edda in the dogaressa's costume immediately. The festival was going on without any rehearsals. 'Rehearsals would kill the spirit of the show!' Schell explained to Ramón.

'But where should I change?' asked Edda coyly. 'I can't go out of my hotel over to yours in the costume of a dogaressa. Could you come over to see me?'

'With delight.'

'Of course you can't trot about in the costume of the dogaressa,' said Schell. 'The journalists would start hunting you down in gondolas. But for the same reason wouldn't it be better, Señora Edda, if you came here? You could change here, there are four rooms in this suite.'

'As a matter of fact that's still better!'

'Then talk it over between you. Now, unfortunately, I must leave,' said Schell, getting up. 'I might not be able to see you tomorrow, there are so many things to do. Ramón, why don't you show Señora Edda the surroundings of Venice? You might go on a little excursion. But try to slip away from the reporters.'

'Wait, I want you to see me in the crown. I'll bring it in right away,' said Ramón, and went into the next room.

'Light of my life, your fate is in your own hands now: he's even stupider than you,' said Schell in Russian.

'This is a genuine *coup de foudre*, everything in Ramón is genuine. To be sure, in Venice there are no women who can speak Spanish. It's terribly awkward making love through an interpreter. And how did the contact with the American youngster come off?'

'Brilliantly,' answered Edda radiantly.

At first Jim was depressed. His uncle had left for Berlin some time before. Jim knew no one in Venice, and disliked admitting to himself that he was rather bored in this city of joy and happiness. But when Edda told him in a tragic tone that they had to part—Fate is stronger than man!—he rather rudely cheered up at once. This irritated Edda.

'In any case we must keep up our professional relations. Further assignments are going to be given you.'

'I'm afraid that's impossible,' he answered, embarrassed. 'Uncle writes that I'm being transferred to the United States.'

Now it was her turn to cheer up rather rudely. Then what will they be asking me to do? she thought.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE dogaresa was brought to the Festival of Beauty in a magnificently decked-out gondola with a huge brocaded pavilion.

Edda's dress was ravishing. The ladies of the entourage observed it with envious acknowledgment. They were not stars—not very many stars had come either—the company consisted of second-rate actresses who were perplexed: 'Who is she? Why has no one ever heard of her? How did she get the role of dogaresa?' Schell set rumours going to the effect that Edda had only just escaped from Rumania, where she had been celebrated. Rumanian stars might not, after all, be known in western Europe. The ladies of the cinema were obliged to admit that the Rumanian star was extremely beautiful and that she was superlatively dressed and made up. Her crown made a powerful impression on the company. 'Ten thousand dollars, if it's not fake!' one woman said with decision. 'No, seven or eight!' protested another.

Only the evening before the diamonds and rubies of the crown were artificial. The secretary had brought them to Ramón that morning. He glanced at them and exploded. 'At my festival the dogaresa's crown cannot be adorned with glass rattles! Put this rubbish back in the case; I'll take it with me,' he said. With the case in his hand, he went to his gondola and set out for Edda's hotel, as arranged with her.

'First we'll go to see the jeweller,' he declared. Edda

modestly cast down her eyes. He liked this a lot. 'Those numskulls put false jewels on your crown! *Your* crown!'

A ring or a brooch would no doubt be a present, but about the crown it was impossible to say with certainty. Perhaps I'll have to return the crown, Edda thought. But if it turns out to be a present, why, that's an enormous amount of money! Edda got extremely excited. Should I thank him? But if he's not making it a present? For his attentiveness? But you can hardly thank someone for being attentive the same way as for a present! flashed through her mind. She thanked him as though ~~for~~ his attention, but 'threw him a heavenly glance,' as though he might expect more.

Because of his duties as a bodyguard Schell scarcely saw Natasha at the festival. From a distance she saw him walking through the ballroom, actually saw only his head raised above the trellises. Just like the movies, where they sometimes show you not the whole person but just his legs for instance. It's always terrifying, it makes him look like a criminal.

The loud-speaker explained in three languages that a marionette show was going to begin at once upstairs on the third floor. Part of the public rushed back from the buffet tables. Natasha sighed and also went upstairs.

Toward ten o'clock the discipline in the palace slackened. Down below a gay hubbub could be heard. The mezzanine was also very animated. The doge and the dogaressa left their thrones. Ramón passed from one ballroom to another, politely responding by gestures to

the enthusiastic greetings and ordered the servants to keep uncorking more and more bottles. Alone, and with the regal look of a châtelaine, holding her train over her left arm, the dogaressa sauntered to and fro. Shouts were also addressed to her. She blew kisses to the crowd, stopped at every table, and drank a full glass. Her head was swimming. She also stopped before the mirrors; each told her that she was the fairest of them all.

Schell came across her in one of the rooms. In spite of being in such a happy state Edda's face very nearly twitched with fury. With the peremptory gesture of a dogaressa she indicated her desire to speak with him. She can't do a thing, we're leaving tomorrow no matter what. . . . Natasha's upstairs, he thought. One of the salons had not been used for the festival, and he respectfully led the dogaressa into it. They sat down in the easy-chairs.

'You are magnificent, my sweet,' he said. 'I have never seen a better dogaressa in my life!'

'You're also magnificent, a magnificent scoundrel!' she replied. Schell raised his eyebrows.

'And wherefore this unkindness, O woman of splendid rages?'

'A scoundrel of scoundrels! You said I was a fool, didn't you? But I sensed the truth, with my heart and my mind! Your boss has told me the truth! You tried to pass off that bedraggled wife of yours to me as his mistress! But there's a limit even to shamelessness and lies! I almost fainted when he asked me whether I knew your wife!'

'Almost doesn't count,' said Schell. 'It would have done you no good at all if you'd fainted.'

'And if I didn't faint it was only because you became loathsome to me a long time ago! But I'm going to tell him everything!'

'And will you also tell him, my little cherry blossom, that you're a Soviet agent?'

She was speechless for a moment. 'I see you're a black-mailer, in addition to your other virtues. . . . I'll drown her in vitriol!'

'I don't advise it,' he said, and his eyes became malevolent and cruel. Edda was alarmed. 'I have reason to think that afterward the vitriol would fall back on to your own little face. Let's talk seriously. Yes, I did get married, but what about it? I had a right to; even in Berlin I noticed that I had become loathsome to you. That subjected me to severe spiritual torments. And even more when you went off with that young American.'

'Who is she? He called her Natalia. Were you already married to her in Berlin?'

'No. You know perfectly well that I loved you and you only. As long as you didn't throw me over . . .'

'B-bore! . . . But what did you do after I threw you over?'

'I tore my hair out. But after the upheaval I decided that love can't be forced. Also, I would like to part from you amiably. Agree that I made you happy. Without me you'd never have clapped eyes on a dog any more than you could fly. Is he already your lover, or is he only going to be in the next hour or two?'

'My private life is absolutely no concern of yours. . . . Is she Russian, your dear little wife?'

'My private life is absolutely no concern of yours.'

Wait a moment! What's this? Have the artificial diamonds on your crown been replaced by real ones? I'm cut to the quick!

'D'you think he's going to give it to me?' asked Edda uneasily.

'Possibly. If you behave yourself I'll advise him to. Generally speaking, he intends to gold-plate you. And you're going to be wholly indebted to me for it.'

'I know he has a high regard for you; I simply can't understand it. But I'm going to open his eyes about you.'

'Then I'll open his eyes about you, too. . . . I repeat, we must part on good terms. We know and are fond of each other. Let's make a gentleman's agreement. I urge you strongly to babble less. Then I'll say nothing but the nicest things about you. In general, take it easy with Ramón. Don't go in for hysteria, hold yourself down to a few simple little scenes. Keep in mind that he's primitive and hot-tempered, he might even beat you up. You probably won't have anything against that, but his generosity will be cut down by it. Whatever he says to you say: "That's just what I was going to say!" or "I was just going to suggest that!" Go into raptures about his ideas. And now, radiant dogarressa, you must return to your subjects. Go out first, by yourself.'

'Are you afraid your dear little wife might see us together? It doesn't matter. I can always get you away from her the moment I feel like it. I'd give half my life if she ran away from you!'

'I'm afraid the doge might see us together. Then he would throw me from the balcony into the Grand Canal. Aside from which you wouldn't get the crown then.'

'Well, all right, then, I agree to the gentleman's agreement. You always had an influence over me. Only you! The explanation I give is that it's because I was careless enough to surrender to you the very first day I met you. That's dreadfully important!'

'On what day of your acquaintance did you surrender to Jim?'

'The first day, too, but that was because of duty.'

'And Ramón?'

'Ramón on the second.'

'Hang on to him, light of my life.'

'I'm trying to. The men I throw over don't forget me. And you won't forget me, either.'

'There's just one more thing, my little lotus flower. Everything in your life so far has always ended up with a fiasco. This time strain every cell in your tiny little brain. Devour everything that comes your way with the avidity of a barracuda. Take as much money from Ramón as you can, it's a work pleasing to the Lord. Make yourself secure.'

When he was alone he started smoking another cigarette; he smoked incessantly now. He had a terrible headache. And never before had he had such feelings of self-disgust. He was not afraid Edda was going to drench Natasha in 'vitriol,' but a vague presentiment of great misfortune had suddenly begun tormenting him. There's not the slightest reason for it; on the contrary, everything is going very well indeed. . . . Where's Natasha? We must go home at once, instantly.

The large, opulently costumed puppets, with bedaubed

faces and carefully plaited hair, hurtled about the stage chattering and turning their eyes around in their motionless faces. There was also a carousal; Robespierre was chasing after Marie Antoinette. A female spy with a fox-like face was finally captured, and a paper with some numbers was found on her.

Suddenly Natasha felt a pain in her heart. What is it? What's happened? For a moment she couldn't remember: it was the sheet of paper that had fallen out of the dictionary: '320. . . .' Well, and what of it? What nonsense again!

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. And even later she still couldn't understand what was happening to her. The strangest, most unexpected thoughts suddenly took possession of her. Could the whole thing have been a mistake? It can't be! I'll simply go out of my mind. . . . And if it's a mistake, what can I do now? Go to a convent! But there are no Russian Orthodox convents here. . . . And I love him. . . . What can I do? I mustn't cry, people might notice. . . . It's dark, they can't see. Surely I can't leave him! No, I'm just dreaming everything. . . . Hide everything from him. . . . Of course, of course, hide everything. . . . But he says I'm incapable of lying. . . . It's all nonsense, all of it! she cried out to herself. Her tears kept flowing all the more copiously.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THEY left Venice the following day. Ramón escorted them to the station, bringing Natasha a huge box of sweets. He was extremely affable. He thanked Schell warmly and it was not quite clear whether he was thanking him for the festival or for Edda.

'We may see you again in Berlin. She told me she's going to have to go there to settle her apartment and get her things. Of course I'll be going with her,' he said, a little embarrassed, although he didn't hide his liaison with Edda. Schell nodded approvingly and asked to be remembered to her. 'What a charming woman,' he said.

'She has great regard for you. She told me what an extraordinary man you are.' Quite so, thought Schell, although he had not had any doubt that even Edda would keep this gentleman's agreement. 'Though I knew it without her. And how was the festival?'

'Beyond all praise,' said Schell. 'I'm convinced the world press is going to be trumpeting about the Festival of Beauty for another whole month. You've done society an enormous service.'

As was proper he said he would stay at the station till the train left; as was proper Schell replied that that was quite unnecessary—why waste his time, and it was so nice of him to have come to the station. One hand won't be enough, thought Schell, I'll stretch out both. We're plainly passing from the stage of friendly acquaintances to that of old friends; if he were Russian we'd have to

embrace, too. Ramón kissed Natasha's hand; concealing her impatience, she was waiting for him to leave; he wished her good health and left for his gondola.

'He's very nice, but thank God he's finally left!' said Natasha. 'Though it's bad to say things like that.'

'You always put in "It's bad to say things like that," then you say them.'

'Not in the least. You're just making it all up, Eugenio. Tell me, what's my name?'

'Have you taken leave of your senses?'

'My name is Natalia Ilyinishna Schell. Say it!'

'Natasha Schell, Natasha Schell, very stupid, but unusually sweet. In this world, in this "all-hating world," decent people hardly make up a substantial majority, but some manage very successfully to pass themselves off as decent. Some of them don't even notice this, with others it gets to be a habit, but you . . .'

She was looking at him, hardly hearing what he was saying, but thinking her own thoughts. Then she burst out laughing. 'Always the same nonsense! I've heard that quotation from you before.'

' . . . So you're satisfied with being Natasha Schell?'

'Not especially,' she said. In some incomprehensible way her depression had also evaporated.

They stayed in Schell's Berlin apartment. Natasha liked the furniture very much and began elaborating on how she could arrange it in their little house on the Lido (she never said 'villa').

His 'cello made her wildly enthusiastic. She begged him to play, but he refused, his face twitching.

'I'll never play it again. I've given it up.'

'Why have you given it up?'

'For no reason. I'll have to sell it. I once paid a great deal of money for it.'

'You probably bought it after winning a lot?' asked Natasha.

'Yes, I bought it after winning,' said Schell unwillingly. He had bought the 'cello after one of his most difficult assignments.

They went to plays and movies and dined in the best restaurants; Schell threw money about even more than before. He was in a good mood. Berlin aroused painful memories in him, but that was in the past—there would be no more colonels from now on. Nevertheless, he went over to spend some time in the eastern part of the city, without any special need to. The atmosphere there seemed to him not quite what it had been before. Perhaps some more 'incidents' are being readied up. In that case we'll have to leave sooner. I detest 'incidents' more than anything in the world. I've had enough of them! He went home with relief and was puzzled at how he could have gone over there. There's very little risk, but with Natasha I don't have the right to assume even a small risk.

Natasha moved her things to their flat and arranged them with a smile, they were so conspicuous there. She arranged her books on the same shelves as Schell's, which she had examined with curiosity the very first day. On a shelf in the middle she noticed a large medical reference book, about a thousand pages. When she was alone she examined this at length; she didn't know just what months the signs of pregnancy made their appearance.

She felt awkward going to a physician or midwife. But she couldn't find anything.

When Natasha pushed the tight-fitting book back in, a capacious folder fell out and some engravings were scattered about on the floor. She began looking through them. Most of them had a signature that was new to her. She put them all back in the folder upside down. She had a disagreeable feeling that kept growing. All the engravings had very frivolous themes; someone with austere tastes might even have called them pornographic. How surprising! He must have collected them a long time ago, when he was very young. . . . He's simply fond of art. Odd that it was just these he collected. . . . For some reason, though there was no connection at all, Natasha recalled once again the sheet of paper with the numerals on it. She hastened to put the folder back in its former position.

They went together to the removers' office; the removers undertook to transport everything to Venice very quickly.

'We're going to live wonderfully! Don't you think that?'

'I think so, and for that matter I'm sure of it,' answered Schell.

Still, when they got home he sighed. What a pity to leave this apartment, he thought. It's seen a great deal of living. A big chunk of one's life will leave with it. Disgusting, but big. Although there were no disasters, since I'm still alive and kicking. But I've never applied myself to anything. The main thing for a man is to have something to apply himself to, to a family, a job, a career. Now I'm finally applying myself to something, thank God.

. . . My whole life has been one delirium; and what's happening in the world today is also delirium. How is it they don't see that? And such boring delirium.

At Natasha's request they went off to Grunewald that evening for dinner. They dined on the terrace and sat around until ten. The little lamps with coloured shades on the tables had long since been turned down, and the terrace had turned cozy as a result; but the evening was rather chilly, with a wind blowing.

'Won't you catch cold?' Schell kept asking.

'Never again!' she answered too fervently for the question, as though under his protection even catching cold was impossible. On the way back she started to sneeze. She was dreadfully ashamed of this: a head cold!

That night she began coughing. She suppressed her coughs in order not to disturb Schell, but he woke up. Natasha overflowed with apologies. 'I've stopped your sleeping! D'you want me to go into the study right away? And for three months now I haven't coughed once! It had to happen just now!'

'But isn't this how it used to be with you before, too?' he asked in alarm.

'Oh, no, it's not *that* way. . . . Yes, it *used* to be . . . of course, it used to be,' she said, coughing and trying to wipe away her tears imperceptibly.

Neither slept any more that night. Toward morning she had a temperature. Schell rang up the same specialist he had forced her to see in the autumn.

The specialist thought it advisable to give her an injection of penicillin. He calmed Natasha, who was taking great pains to look as though she were not in the least

upset. But in the study, talking to Schell in a low tone, the specialist did not hide the fact that the patient's left lung was not in very good condition.

'It will pass off, of course. Nevertheless, the patient should not remain in Berlin. Is it possible for you to leave?'

'Whenever I please for wherever I please.'

'Then get ready to leave in a week.'

As ill luck would have it Natasha turned out to be allergic to penicillin, and that evening she got worse. The specialist came again, cancelled the previous treatment, prescribed a new one, and once again advised Schell to leave, this time even more insistently.

'We have a villa near Venice, on the Lido. Would that be all right?'

The specialist frowned. 'The sea, canals . . .' he said reluctantly. 'No, for the time being I'd advise you to begin by staying in the mountains. In a good sanatorium.'

'In Davos?' asked Schell, changing countenance.

'Why Davos especially? There's no tuberculosis yet.'

'Really not, Professor?'

'Really. There's only the danger that it might appear. An analysis will show everything. I don't deny that the patient has gotten worse since autumn. But I don't foresee any danger. She has a very tired organism. Probably her life hasn't been easy?'

'No, not easy! At the age of sixteen she was a prisoner of war!' said Schell. He recalled the underground factory and suddenly his eyes blazed in frenzy. The specialist glanced at him, and in embarrassment, without asking any further questions, took his leave.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IN Berlin Edda, like Natasha, had had only one room in a pension. She had taken nearly all her things along to Venice. Now she moved everything she had left into a huge suite taken by Ramón in the best hotel. She came across a photograph of Schell in a dressing-gown, with a not very decorous inscription. Usually whenever she provided herself with a new lover she burned the photographs of his predecessor; she ascribed some mystical significance to this. But she didn't feel like burning this one. What if everything still isn't finished with him? She hid the photograph in a box and put the key in her bag.

Ramón had been somewhat startled by her proposal to go to Berlin. What for? A boring town. It had not been easy for Edda to persuade him. She didn't very much want to go back there herself, but she thought it imperative to see the Soviet colonel and get his release, final and permanent, on friendly terms; she was frightened by what Schell had said to her.

She particularly did not like to go over to the eastern section of the city now, although tens of thousands of people passed back and forth daily and came back unhindered. This time she, too, had far less time than before; she bought and ordered everything it was possible to buy and order. The bills were sent to Ramón, who paid them unprotestingly. As for money, he didn't offer her any. If I ask, he'll probably give it to me, she thought, but in the long run I'll get more.

She herself did not understand very clearly what 'in the long run' meant. Sometimes she thought irresolutely about marrying him. It's true he said he would never marry anyone. Well, they all say that! But is it worth it after all? She didn't like him in the least, he bored her, she wanted to keep her freedom. And what if he wants to carry me off to the Philippine Islands? I wouldn't go so far away for anything, to such a wilderness! But we can live both here and in his palace in Seville, and there he'll have to fork over a sum of money. Edda also didn't know just what sum of money to ask for. Should I rely on his generosity or would I be letting him off too cheap?

In Berlin she had an attack of hysterical lying. She told Ramón about her fabulous successes and adventures. When she was fourteen years old none other than John Barrymore had predicted a tremendous future on the stage for her. Later, in Rome, Mussolini had taken an unusual interest in her. 'But I wouldn't even hear of him. I wasn't going to be one of those Petaccis of his! I fled with my mother from Italy immediately; he was simply in despair!' Ramón listened inattentively and sourly.

Ramón was really bored. In Venice he had been busy with the festival, in Berlin the twenty-four hours of the day were free. He knew no one. He did not understand why they were hanging around there; it was boring wherever you were, but in Paris, and especially in Seville, it would be gayer. Edda tried to humour him by thinking up diversions and by telling anecdotes over dinner. They lost still further in being translated into mediocre Spanish. Once she also tried to tell him an off-colour story, even

though she didn't happen to know the key words in Spanish. It turned out badly: Ramón exploded and said that he didn't like stories like that in general and that for *ladies* they were quite inadmissible.

' . . . Poetesses are allowed to do a great many things that other ladies of course shouldn't,' said Edda, embarrassed. This idea and her embarrassment mollified him.

' . . . You shouldn't prostitute your personality with words like that!' he said portentously. He thought he was about fed up with Edda. One harpy was the same as another. He decided to leave her once they were in Spain. It won't be too difficult to buy myself out. In Seville I'll say I'm going on a trip around the world; maybe I will at that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CATASTROPHE struck Colonel Number Two quite unexpectedly.

After the answer he got from Moscow he had every reason to expect a reward. Promotion to general was practically assured, and they might give him a medal as well as a financial bonus. While extremely agreeable, it would not settle the question of his job. He no longer felt like staying in the West; everything there was alien to him and almost all of it distasteful. He couldn't obtain regular command duty, indeed he was probably no longer fit for it. There wasn't much chance of staff duty. In his present department a still higher post meant still nastier work. He thought it might be best, after all, to retire.

He was confronted by the same question, the same wretched question of ageing people: what should one do with the remaining years of one's life? The colonel was meditating on everything. He scarcely paused at all over the usual banal idea of writing his memoirs. No one in Russia writes his memoirs, except perhaps someone who has a safe-deposit box abroad, and even for him it's dangerous. And besides, in the war I never saw anything particularly important, I just saw what everyone else did.

In his free time the colonel would sometimes go to a bookshop. He bought primarily books about war, sometimes about history. This June, too, he went into a shop. There were no new war books. He came across an old

book of Serge Aksakov. His attention was attracted by its binding, which was very good and wonderfully preserved. The colonel opened the book; his eye fell on a sentence: 'Aside from the three species I have described, Orenburg Province is occasionally visited by black hares, of usual shape and size; I have never succeeded in killing any of them.' These words struck the colonel; he *had* to kill a black hare!

He could not consider himself a real hunter. He didn't shoot very well in the air and didn't like swift hunting-dogs (although Aksakov didn't either). In his youth he had hunted in his free time, which even then he had never had very much of. But this book was a revelation to him: that was what was left in life! But at once he made the objection that with a lame foot he couldn't walk through fields, swamps, or woods. Practically, therefore, the book was not of much use to him, but he felt he had to buy it without fail at whatever price. He saw a chapter heading about hunting with snares and traps. He was still fit for this kind of hunting, which wouldn't be too tiring. He also came across an exhortation from some old-fashioned hunting manual: 'Be a hunter, have fun, enjoy your good amusement; for it is an excellent occupation and a becoming one; so that no sorrows and troubles may overcome you—oh, my good counsellors, and true ones, and ye wise hunters! Be happy and of good cheer, be contented and delighted in your hearts through the remembrance of all these joys of former years.' Made to order for me! he thought, and bought the book, even though it was printed in the old Russian orthography that hurt his eyes.

When he went home that evening he put the coffee on, sat down at his desk, and turned over the pages of the whole book. There were two volumes bound as one: *Notes on Angling* and *A Hunter's Tales and Reminiscences*. He did not pause very long over the first volume; he simply glanced a little at these *Notes* and quickly passed over to the traps and snares. He was struck by the similarity of this kind of hunting to what he had been dealing with himself during the past few years. Wolves and foxes were caught in just the same way as he captured spies. The choice of the bait, the verisimilitude, the unobtrusiveness, all just what we do! Perhaps a real intelligence agent actually ought to be a hunter. I think Schell said that that American hunts, thought the colonel, happily recalling the documents from the Rocquencourt furnace.

The book determined his plans. Even if they suggest another post, would it be worth taking? To be sure our people don't suggest posts, they appoint us to them. Nevertheless, it's possible to get out of it, on the grounds of my lameness and disability. I'll say I've become unfit for work. They won't insist. And then a retired general could settle in the provinces. Then I could really be at home. I'll buy a horse, I can still ride. Could I build a little house? . . . I'll get up at five in the morning, take along a thermos bottle with coffee, a bottle of Crimean wine. . . . He read until late in the night and grew more and more enthusiastic.

Thanks to his satisfying decision and to his great professional coup he had become far more cheerful than he had been. He also became more condescending to people; before very nearly half his time and labour

had been spent on undoing the intrigues, plots and snares of his colleagues. Now this took up somewhat less time.

And then the misfortune exploded.

In a new memorandum he got from headquarters he was menacingly informed that he had received misinformation, which had already led to pernicious and wasteful measures on the part of the military authorities!

The misinformation had been composed so skilfully that at first Moscow headquarters had believed it, too. One circumstance that had gone unnoticed by the colonel had also not been noticed immediately there either. It had left no doubts—all the documents had been fabricated for the purpose of misleading the Soviet military department; the chief document sent them, containing alleged information on atom bombs, was dated March 18. However, the female agent who had so successfully procured these documents directly from the American furnace at Rocquencourt had transmitted them on March 17. The evidence was irrefutable.

The colonel was stupefied.

Instead of a brilliant affair it had turned out to be scandalous and damaging. Instead of a decoration, promotion, bonus, he now had to wait for a major catastrophe. At best he could only count now on retirement pure and simple, together with all the consequences of disgrace. As to what the worst might be, only gloomy guesses were admissible. The road to the concentration camp is broad, the road back narrow. . . . And to think I'll be judged on the basis of one mistake! All my work, all my achievements, all my service will be forgotten in a flash, they'll just recall this one single blunder.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

'I'm going out tomorrow morning,' said Edda. 'If we're flying the day after, I have to do my last shopping, you remember I told you.'

Ramón shrugged his shoulders. 'Buy whatever you like,' he said. He was getting more and more bored with her.

She thanked him, not very warmly, according to her own rule: the more grateful you are the less he'll give.

Alarming rumours were already spreading throughout Berlin about the expected riots in the East Sector of the city, but she knew nothing about them; they didn't know anyone, she didn't talk to the servants, while with tailors and milliners she talked only about far more interesting things. Edda did not read any newspapers.

She went out the next morning very early, having put on an old dress and sealed her visiting card in a little envelope. Schell in his time had showed her this. She instructed her chauffeur to stop quite far away from the boundary. She saw the gloomy warning: *Achtung! Sie verlassen nach 80 m. West Berlin*, and thought it might be better not to cross over; she crossed over and continued on foot. She deliberately generated the gloomiest premonitions—she thought it would help: if you expect the worst the best will come out.

She gave the little envelope to the officer on duty, and was received immediately, which reassured her. But going into the colonel's office she had a feeling—

something was wrong! The expression of his eyes, which had frightened her even at their first meeting, was now simply terrifying. He didn't pretend to get up, did not respond to her ingratiating smile; he merely nodded sharply, the corner of his mouth twitching the while.

'What day did you get the papers from the American lieutenant?' he asked in an icy tone without allowing her to say a word. Edda was extremely frightened. For a moment she couldn't recall, then she did and answered with precision.

'What day did you hand them over where you were told to?'

'The same evening,' she replied, and trembled; she remembered that Jim had instructed her to hand over the packet on the eighteenth, but she had done it earlier, because of her fittings.

The colonel looked at her viperishly. Edda's look left no doubt that the last thing she herself was thinking of was any kind of 'misinformation.' Arrest her and ship her off to Moscow! he had thought in the very first moment. But in that case his unwitting fault would be even more serious: headquarters would see to what a fool he had entrusted a most important assignment.

'Did this lieutenant tell you *when* you were supposed to hand over the packet?'

'No. . . . Yes, he said . . . I think he said on the day after, the eighteenth,' Edda stammered, trembling more and more. 'But I thought . . . I decided the sooner I did it the greater would be my zeal.'

Now the matter was completely plain. Idiot! thought the colonel. This time the silliness of what they were

doing appeared to him with particular clarity. The whole thing is futile, he thought, mean, base, and vile. . . . With some relief he realized, I made a fool of myself, but so did the American, although I dare say less so. Of course, this was *his* doing, *his* style. The blasted son of a bitch concocted a crafty scheme and still doesn't know it fell through! Never mind, he soon will! . . . But he's not going to catch hell for it, and I damned well am. . . .

The colonel shot a glance at Edda. And unexpectedly he said to himself that if *his* agent hadn't been an idiot the American would have succeeded in his scheme of misinformation. . . . Of course, that's it! It was only because of her stupidity that we succeeded in detecting the fraud. Suddenly he thought there was no point in destroying this woman. I'm through, but she can make off. Arresting her would be no use at all, more likely to do me harm. Let her go to the devil. . . .

'I'm kicking you out of the service! Get out of here at once! Don't dare show yourself to me again!' he shouted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THAT seventeenth of June, in both parts of Berlin, the signs 'Ami, go home' with which the Berliners had tried to annoy the Americans, began to disappear.

The border between the two worlds passed through the Brandenburg Gate, along the Ebertstrasse and the Potsdamerplatz. This was where people assembled from the various sections of West Berlin. It was said that in the East Sector of the city demonstrations were going on which were being fired upon, that Soviet tanks had been brought into action, that houses were being burned everywhere, and that thousands of people had been killed. Somewhere in the distance smoke was rising. At the border a number of inhabitants of the western quarters had also been wounded. The young people ran through the Brandenburg Gate and flung stones at the 'Vopo'—the *Volkspolizei*, who responded with shots. The crowd was shouting and arguing: 'But it's all senseless! What's the good of stones!' some said. 'So you think you shouldn't do anything but look through your field glasses!' the others answered indignantly. 'The Allies can't allow things to go on this way! They'll be bringing up troops today!' No one in West Berlin wanted war; on the contrary, they were all mortally afraid of it. But that day nearly everyone shared a vague desire for the events to take on the 'grandiose character' which the newspapers were writing about in an obscurely ominous way.

Soviet tanks and trucks were standing on the other side of the Brandenburg Gate, symmetrically and evenly spaced from each other. The Soviet soldiers looked very glum. Some daredevil clambered on the top of the Gate, holding something in his hand. He was watched with excitement. 'They're going to kill him now!' The red flag was flung down and its place was taken by a black, red, and gold one. The crowd expressed itself by clapping.

Edda was sitting in a café and trembling as she had never trembled before in her life.

When she left the colonel she very nearly ran to the underground station, though this wasn't sensible. She was clutching her heart with both hands, and pressing her bag against it. What's happened? Oh, my God, what have I done? Why was he so furious? . . . They'll arrest me! Carry me off! But wouldn't he have arrested me on the spot? But he'll think it over! He'll have me hunted down!

The station was closed. 'A strike!' someone said happily. That's all I need! A taxi! Dangerous! Anyway, there aren't any! What should I do? Oh, my God, if I could only get home!

With her last strength Edda began to run. There was a café not far from the square. No, that's dangerous, this is where his people will be looking for me! I have to get rid of my traces. She ran into another café farther on, where there were a lot of people. She collapsed on to a chair at the first free table, in an obscure corner far from any windows. They won't find me here, they can't have any way of knowing where I went. . . ?

For a long time no one came over to her. She began to breathe more calmly. Without turning her head she eavesdropped on the conversations at neighbouring tables. What's happening? she thought. They're talking about an uprising! An uprising here? My God! Why did I ever come! She tried to understand why the colonel had lost his temper, but she could not. Well, what if I did give them in a day ahead of time? If Jim had gotten angry about it, I'd understand it, but why should that accursed colonel?

A waiter came over and glumly asked what she wanted. Edda thought she'd have to ask for beer or coffee, that would look poorer, more socialistic. No, I must have something very strong. The gloomy waiter brought her a double glass of Weinbrandt's. She eavesdropped again. Yes, that's what it is, an uprising! Damn them! They couldn't postpone it for two days! We'd be in Spain by then. . . . Franco's got law and order, he's a tough egg, he knows them!

Edda thought of what would happen if she were held up at the Iron Curtain. In a day Ramón would alert the police, they'll take steps; with his money it's possible to do everything! But then the police are sure to open the box in the drawer of the desk and find that photograph! My God, then Ramón won't do anything for me! He'll simply leave by himself! And he won't leave me a sou! And he'll take away all his presents. . . . I'm done for!

She decided to make her way home on foot. In the streets it didn't seem as though anything so terrible were happening, it was simply that the people looked unusually

gloomy and mean. Suddenly shots were heard in the distance. Edda started to run back to the café. But you can get killed there, too! And I think that's just the side they're shooting from! So she kept on running in the first direction she had taken. It's not so far now. . . . If only I can get through! And then I'll insist that we leave today, without fail, for Spain by air or somewhere else! We'll take off to wherever there's an airplane for! What a mistake it was to come here! she thought. And suddenly it crossed her mind that her whole life had been a mistake, that everywhere, in the safest place, with or without money, her existence would be what it had always been, squalid and shameful.

A mob was surging out of a side alley into the square. The demonstrators were moving in step, marching with flags aloft and singing. Edda could make out some of the words: '*Ulbricht, Pieck und Grotewohl—Wir haben von euch die Schnauze voll!*' Does that mean they're not Communists? I can't go after them. In a frenzy the crowd on the sidewalks applauded the demonstrators. They were being slowly followed by trucks full of German police carrying machine-guns in their hands. The police also looked very morose, as well as somehow extremely embarrassed. Suddenly there was a stillness.

'Pigs!' a woman with a broom standing near Edda suddenly screamed. And as though this were just the cry they had all been waiting for, a frenzy swept over the crowd.

'Scoundrels! Killing your own brothers! Hang them on the lamp-posts!'

With a screech of desperation the woman hurled herself

from the sidewalk and raising her broom on high flung herself toward the last truck. The policeman, turning pale, pointed his tommy-gun at her. 'A-a-a!' the woman screamed, beside herself. 'Shoot, you son of a bitch, shoot!' The roaring grew wilder and wilder. A young man in a short jacket rushed out from the doorway, leaned over low, bent himself to one side, and hurled a stone into the truck. That same second shots rang out. The woman dropped the broom and clutching her stomach went on screaming on her feet. Behind her, on the sidewalk with scarcely a moan, Edda collapsed. She had been killed outright.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THAT day from early morning on Colonel Number One received one report after another in his office. He was considerably better informed than other people, but he didn't know much either. In any case, it was clear to him that in themselves the events could not be considered 'grandiose'; the moment Soviet tanks entered the city no successful uprising was possible. Armed uprising can only just barely be successful now in Asia or South America, the colonel thought, and this uprising isn't even armed. . . .

The Communists are naturally going to claim we arranged the riots. By itself that doesn't matter, but suppose they're looking for a pretext for war? It's true they don't need a pretext very much, they can seize on anything. But what if they seize on this? It's perfectly possible; the temptation's enormous.

Toward noon he learned that the dead were numbered in dozens and the wounded in hundreds. He felt sorry for the people who had been killed; he considered the cause hopeless, but the whole time even he was unable to detach himself from the same confused, terrifying, and joyful feeling: Things were moving! An uprising! The first uprising they've had! What's happening now is just a bloody episode in the cold war. We weren't the ones who began the cold war, and we're ready to cut it short at any moment, if only they would. And even if this uprising turns out to be some sort of prologue to a world war, it's not our responsibility. •

He no longer had very much to do. He was receiving reports, comparing and grouping data, forwarding his summaries to headquarters. For all this it was best not to leave his office. But he felt restless. A trip to the East Sector of the city, and in an American car at that, was tied up with considerable risk. This was not a factor either for or against it; like Schell, the colonel knew there was no fear of *his* being reproached with cowardice. But even if they let me through, he thought, it might only be with some trick in mind: in order to compromise our government, myself, and the insurgents.

But it was possible to go as far as the Iron Curtain, to the Brandenburg Gate or the Potsdamerplatz. The colonel ordered a car. While still some distance away he saw the smoke rising in various places over East Berlin. The shooting was not very heavy; nevertheless, it was shooting of a kind he hadn't heard for a long time. People were streaming toward the Brandenburg Gate. They looked apprehensive and happy at the same time.

He had to leave the car some distance from the Gate; a mob of many thousands made a dense wall. Another man would not have squeezed through, but the colonel was in uniform, in front they all made room for him, and he passed through fairly quickly. He saw that everyone was looking at him, as though he were doing something very important. Do they want me to declare war on Russia?

At the right a machine-gun was chattering. Shooting unarmed people was an easy thing to do, but even an armed uprising wouldn't have any chance of success. The people have launched a hopeless cause simply out

of despair. . . . All the evil in the world comes from *them*! He was overcome by hate, generally very uncharacteristic of him. There are a lot of mistakes on our side, but *they* are the source of all the evil in the world, they, and almost they alone!

He stopped under the arch and looked over into the other world. Some tanks were standing in the square as well as trucks with Soviet soldiers and German policemen. From the other side an open automobile had come up to the Gate. The Soviet colonel stepped out of it.

He had also been receiving reports all morning from various sections of Berlin. The actual measures taken did not depend very much on him; other officers were in charge. Nevertheless, he was responsible for the activities of foreign agents, and was also responsible in case there were no activities when it was regarded as indispensable that there be some. He knew that what would be spoken about officially would be 'riots provoked by foreign agents.'

At any other time the colonel would have been delighted if Moscow had put its German flunkys through the mill. But now it meant nothing to him. . . . Yes, my little song is sung. They're certainly going to pin this business on me: I didn't warn them, didn't inform them, didn't catch the foreign agents. After all, they themselves sometimes begin to believe part of what they have made up. I won't kill any black hares! You can't change your fate. . . . Everyone dreams about his own black hare, but only one man in a hundred ever kills it.

He made his way along the streets where there were no skirmishes going on, and stopped at the Brandenburg

Gate. While still a way off the colonel saw another flag and an enormous crowd assembled at the border of the other world beyond. He felt only hatred for it. Are you staring at us, my fine democratic gentlemen, looking through your binoculars? Well, go on looking. As far as you're concerned, I'm not sorry for you in the least, you're all too stupid! he thought, moving unhurriedly toward the Gate. He looked through the archway and recognized the American colonel standing directly opposite him.

For a moment they looked at each other. They were about to turn aside, but didn't. They considered saluting, but didn't. For that matter, they both had the same rank.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SCHELL and Natasha took two rooms in the Swiss mountains, in a sanatorium that gallantly called itself a rest home. A physician examined Natasha, made all the tests, and confirmed the diagnosis of the Berlin specialist. The treatment consisted of rest and pure mountain air reinforced by nourishment. Natasha was instructed to pass the greater part of the day lying down, either in the large garden of the house or on the intricately constructed sun terrace. Well, that's not so difficult, part of the day he'll sit with me, too, we'll read side by side, thought Natasha. While still in Berlin it had occurred to her that she was probably not long-lived. Perhaps I love life so much just because of my illness; all consumptives are that way, that's why they have such high colour. Of course it would be better, incomparably better in our little house on the Lido, but what can be done about it, life is possible here, too.

Natasha arranged her things on the very first day and began knitting. The work, as it always did, flew through her hands. On the terrace when there was no one nearby, she sang to herself in a low voice; she sang better because he had praised her. Schell wanted to tell her that it was harmful for her to sing, but he couldn't make up his mind to. She soon acquired the general sympathy of the rest home.

'We're going to have a wonderful summer here together, Natalia Ilyinishna!'

'Wonderful!'

'But there's one English expression' "to put all your eggs into one basket": that's what both of us have done very carelessly. What will you do if I suddenly die? Yes, death. . . . Forgive my talking about such things in general, but I'm so much older than you. I think someone said that before forty a man lives on the interest on the capital of his health, but after forty on the capital.'

'For heaven's sake, don't say such things!' In spite of herself Natasha thought that an athlete like himself might have forgone saying that, especially to her. 'In any case you won't be ahead of me. . . . I don't intend to die either, but if my illness were to become dangerous then nevertheless I'd feel like moving into our little house. Gogol says Italy's where one must die.'

'What nonsense you're talking!' he said. His face twitched. 'We're not moving to Italy so that you can die there!'

'But I only said that just in case. Forgive me, I won't any more. I know I'm going to get better. Oh, if only he would say clearly just how much time I'm going to have to live in the sanatorium!'

'In the rest home. He has told me. June, July and August. That's when life in the mountains is very pleasant, and in Italy it's too hot. But in autumn we'll go home.'

'May God grant it! But how I've complicated your life! I've absolutely ruined it!'

'Probably just the opposite! You're my salvation!' said Schell sincerely. Natasha looked at him questioningly. 'Without you I simply shouldn't have known what to do with myself. And would probably have gambled away

everything I have at cards. I've told you, haven't I, that gambling used to be my passion?"

'You told me, but I didn't realize you gambled so heavily.'

'Alas, I did. But from now on I'll probably never take another card in my hand. With Ramón I was just amusing myself, and even then rarely. If I had played a real game with him we would be much richer now!'

That's true! Natasha thought with relief. He did tell me that Ramón didn't know how to play at all. . . . But now, *no matter what*, I think I would forgive him everything! she said to herself, recalling with horror all her own obscure feelings at the puppet show. And I'm never even going to think of that again, never!

Schell was especially happy now at having some money. A fine fellow I should be now without any! He had taken the two best rooms, sent to Zurich for a radio and gramophone for Natasha, and ordered a great many Russian records and books in Paris.

Sometimes he would read aloud to her in the evenings. He firmly refused to read any Turgenev; it was one of Natasha's sorrows that he didn't like him. But among her books a little volume of Chekhov's plays turned up. Schell read them gladly.

Nevertheless, the thought that he was bored with her pursued Natasha. Finally she thought up a diversion for him: 'Now look, our things are in Venice already, and we have to have them moved to our little house,' she said to him. 'Go down there for a few days and do all that. Or else the authorities will sell them right at the station!'

'They won't sell anything. We'll find everything in complete security.'

'Yes, but even if they don't sell them, if you moved everything over, arranged it, and put some order into it, then in September I would have much less work to do. And at the same time you'd have a little change, too. Where is he now, your Ramón and his dogaressa?' said Natasha, through some train of thought that was not clear to her or agreeable. 'And you can leave me alone now perfectly well for as much as a whole week. I feel very well. I won't even be too bored.'

The first time Schell did not agree. She mentioned it a second and a third time. He bet himself: heads I go.

'That's always the way! Women do just as they please with us. Probably they did it with Napoleon himself. I think it was he who said that in love there was only one victory—flight.'

'And you'll be able to take advantage of the opportunity: you can go and not come back, eh?'

'That's very possible. But have no fear, I would settle up the bill for the rest home from Venice. I'm a gentleman.'

In Venice he called up Edda's hotel while still in the station, without giving his name, and when he heard she had left for Berlin he sighed with relief; Edda had become just as repellent to him as to Jim. Sometimes he was even irritated at the thought that it was thanks to him that she was now rich.

He stopped at the same hotel, where he was greeted deferentially. The manager, laughing, spoke about Ramón: the guests at the Festival of Beauty had been

well satisfied. He had spent a lot of money on presents, too.

The work in the little house did not turn out to be much. For three days he arranged his things and books together with the workmen, hammered in nails, mended and repaired things; he was fond of tinkering and was a very good handyman. He himself was surprised at the amount of rubbish he had accumulated. He threw out a great deal, he didn't even hang up all the pictures—some of them either bored him or had ceased to please him. How could I ever have bought such trash? He came across a huge envelope with photographs of the women who had loved him. He glanced through them and thought, not without satisfaction, that these women were now completely indifferent to him. I practically never even think of them. And a very good thing Natasha hasn't come across the envelope. It's also surprising that a lot of kind people still haven't told her about Edda.

Now the villa, drenched in the June sun, was extremely cozy. He sat in each room and in each smoked a cigarette through, in order not to offend any room and not to attract bad luck. Yes, if only she gets well! Surely we won't have to move into the sanatorium for good? And sell this little house, *our* house! Natasha, to his satisfaction, said *our* house, *our* books, *we* got hungry; it was only about money that she always said *your* money. No, that's impossible! That would be a terrible blow to her. And to me an even worse one. He felt that, even if it was sometimes a little dull with Natasha, without her it would be boring and oppressive. The doctors had not calmed him very much about her health, even though they hadn't

frightened him very much either. Yes, I was telling her the truth, without her I'd be completely done for. I couldn't endure this solitude in which my life has passed!

He also thought about Edda—nearly always with repugnance, but now even more with shame. I treated her shamelessly. To be sure, I fixed things up a little. Under Natasha's influence Schell was trying to find good qualities in everyone. It was particularly difficult to find them in Edda. Natasha herself is an angel. Colonel Number One is simply a good-hearted man, the Soviet colonel also is not a bad chap although only semi-intelligent, and there are a number of attractive traits in Ramón; there may even be some in a scoundrel like myself. But in Edda, at best, aside from her stupidity, there are 'extenuating circumstances.' Such as bad luck, lack of roots, the terrible milieu she's been living in almost since childhood, complete pennilessness. Yes, substantial extenuating circumstances.

Without any reason he decided to stay overnight in the little house, although it was extremely inconvenient; he hadn't taken anything with him, either pyjamas, soap, or toothbrush.

He felt hungry, recalled that in this little hole everything doubtless closed very early, and went out, carefully turning the key in the lock—the instinct of a new proprietor. The café was already in fact shut, but they let him in and gave him some cold meat and wine. He was also trying out the café. I'll probably be in and out of it a thousand times. He was also trying himself out on these deserted streets, on the skies gilded over with stars,

on the trees bathed in a vague moonlight. Now this is mine. . . . How unspeakably beautiful the world is!

'At home' he vacillated between the easy-chair and Natasha's bed. He took off his shoes, and as painstakingly as ever hung his jacket on the back of a chair, unbuttoned his collar, and lay down, putting a leather cushion from the study under his head. He had a feeling he was not going to fall asleep. The moon was reflected in a white spot on the floor of the bedroom. The silence was as though there were no Venice, no Italy, nothing: the stratosphere. He recalled the most terrifying and shameful things in his terrifying and shameful life. Has my spirit changed? That happens no more often than a change of sex! he thought, and had the feeling he used to have before, that his soul was empty, absolutely empty.

He woke up at dawn. I'll go back by the very first motorboat, there'll be a telegram from Natasha at the hotel. They had agreed not to write each other letters.

Only a single telegram had come from Natasha as yet: 'Hardly coughing stay as long as necessary kisses love.' It made him happy. There was no new telegram at the hotel. It's true they had forgotten to agree on how many times they were going to wire each other. Nevertheless, it might mean that Natasha was worse. When he didn't receive a telegram the following day he left for Switzerland.

At the very entrance to the rest home he asked the hall porter whether everything was all right. '*Mais oui, Monsieur, Madame va très bien!*' Thank God! he thought, and almost ran to their rooms. Natasha cried out for joy and threw her arms around his neck. And Schell,

despite his happiness, thought to himself, 'they melted together in one long kiss,' like a long movie fade-out. /,

' . . . I've gained two pounds, or more nearly two and a half! And I'm not coughing! I'll ask for your coffee right away. . . . My Eugenio, my own Eugenio! . . . And how is our little house? . . . Poor darling, you're probably exhausted! . . . '

THE END

